JUSTIN WINGATE RANCHMAN

JOHN H. WHITSON

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By

John H. Whitson

Author of "The Rainbow Chasers," "Barbara, a Woman of the West," etc.

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JUSTIN WINGATE
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BOOK ONE—THE PREPARATION

CHAPTER I

THE DREAMER AND THE DREAM

BEFORE swinging out of the saddle in front of the little school house which was serving as a church, Curtis Clayton, physician and philosopher, looked over the valley which held the story of a romantic hope and where he was to bury his own shattered dream. The rain of the morning had cleared away the bluish ground haze, the very air had been washed clean, and the land lay revealed in long levels and undulating ridges. Behind towered the mountain, washed clean, too, its flat top etched against the sky and every crag and peak standing out sharp and hard as a cameo.

Clayton's broncho pawed restlessly on the edge of a grass-grown cellar. All about the tiny cluster of unoccupied houses were other grass-grown cellars, and the foundation lines of vanished buildings, marking the site of the abandoned town. Beside the school house, from which came now the sound of singing, horses were tied to a long hitching rack. A

few farm wagons stood near, the unaccustomed mud drying on their wheels.

Clayton dismounted and began to tie his horse. His left arm, stiff and bent at the elbow, swung awkwardly and gave such scant aid that he tightened the knot of the hitching strap by pulling it with his teeth. He was dressed smartly, in dust-proof gray, and wore polished riding boots. His unlined face showed depression and weariness. In spite of this it was a handsome face, lighted by clear dark eyes. The brow, massive and prominent, was the brow of a thinker. Over it, beneath the riding cap, was a tangle of dark hair, now damp and heavy. When he spoke to his horse his tones were suggestive of innate kindness. There were no spurs on the heels of his riding boots, and he patted the horse affectionately before turning to the door of the church.

The interior was furnished as a school house. Cramped into the seats, with feet drawn up and arms on the tops of the desks, sat the few people who composed the congregation, young farmers and their wives and small children, with wind-burned, honest faces. Apart from the others was a boy, whose slight form fitted easily into the narrow space he occupied. He sat well forward and looked steadily at the preacher, turning about, however, as all did, when Clayton came in at the door.

Clayton's entrance and the turning about of the people to look broke the rythmic swing of the hymn, but the preacher, standing behind the teacher's desk which served as pulpit, lifted his voice, beating the time energetically with the book he held, and the

hymn was caught up again with vigor. He smiled upon Clayton, as the latter squeezed into a rear seat, as if to assure him that he was welcome and had disturbed no one.

The preacher took his text from the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah:

"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. . . . Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not."

Clayton was not greatly interested in the Scripture read, in the preacher, nor in the people. He had entered to get away from his own thoughts more than anything else. But, weary of thinking, he tried now to let the preacher lead him out of himself.

His attention was caught and held by the application of the text. The preacher was using it not as a spiritual metaphor, but as a promise to be fulfilled literally and materially in the near future and in that place. Looking through the open windows at the level grasslands damp with the recent rain, he saw the good omen. The desert was there now, but men should till it and it should blossom as the rose; yellow grain fields should billow before the breezes that came down from the mountain; the blue bloom of alfalfa should make of the valley a violet cup spilling its rich perfume on the air and offering its treasure of honey for the ravishing of the bee; rice corn, Kaffir corn, and sorghum should stand rank on rank,

plumed, tufted, and burnished by the sunlight. Paradise—Clayton heard the name of the valley and the town for the first time—should become as the Garden of God.

Clayton saw that the man was a dreamer, putting into form the cherished hopes of the people in the narrow seats before him. A land boom had cast high its tide of humanity, then had receded, leaving these few caught as the drift on the shore. The preacher was one of them; and he looked into their eyes with loving devotion and flushing face, as he contrasted the treeless valley of the present with the Paradise of his desire. He was a dreamer who believed his dream and was trying to make his hearers believe it.

At first Clayton had observed the outer man standing behind that teacher's desk; he had noted the shabby, shiny suit of black, scrupulously clean, the coat much too long and every way too large, the white neatly-set cravat, and the protruding cuffs, which he was sure were scissors-trimmed. Now he looked only at the man's face, with its soft brown beard which the wind stirred at intervals, at the straight goodly nose, at the deep-set dreamy eyes, and through the eyes into the mind of the dreamer.

"The temperament of a seer, of a Druid priest, of a prophet of old!" was his thought. "He prophesies the impossible; yet by and by some one may appear who will be able to show that the impossible has had fulfillment. It has happened before."

Willing to forget himself further and know more of this man who, it could be seen, longed for a mental

companionship which the members of his congregation could not give him, Clayton remained after the services, accepting a pressing invitation to tarry awhile.

"We do not often have visitors here now," said the preacher, pathetically.

So through the hot afternoon they sat together in the preacher's little home, the one occupied house in the town, while he dilated on his dream; and as the day grew cool, they walked together by the banks of the tepid stream and looked at the deserted houses and the blaze of the sun behind the flat-topped mountain. The boy who had sat so far forward and given such apparent attention to the sermon walked out with them. Absorbed in studying the personality of the preacher, Clayton gave the silent boy little attention.

As the sun slipped down behind the mountain, throwing pleasant shadows across the valley, Clayton took his horse from the preacher's stable and set out for a ride. And as he went the preacher stood in his doorway, smiling and dreaming his dream.

From his boyhood Peter Wingate had been a dreamer. In his college days the zeal of the missionary was infused into his veins, and the Far West, which he pictured as a rough land filled with rough and Godless men, drew him. He had found it poorer than the East, more direct and simple, more serious and sincere, but not Godless. And he had come to love it. It was a hopeful, toiling land, rough perhaps, but as yet unspoiled.

Then a day came which brought a new interest

into his life. A youth climbed down from a white-topped prairie schooner with a bundle in his arms and entered the preacher's house. The bundle held a baby, whose mother had died in the white-topped wagon. As the youth, who was almost a man in stature, but still a boy in years, told the story of the child, and placed in Wingate's hands its few belongings, he spoke of Paradise. At first the spiritual-minded minister thought he referred to spiritual things, then understood that he was speaking of a new town, situated in a wonderful valley that widened down from the mountains. Thenceforth, though the child had not come from this new town, this new town and its promise became linked in the minister's mind with the child; and by and by he journeyed to it, when the boy was well-grown and sturdy and the town had been caught up suddenly in the whirl of a wild boom.

He began to preach in the new school house, and organized a new church; and soon the fiery earnestness and optimism of the boom was infused into his heart, supplementing the zeal of the missionary. He no longer saw Paradise as it was, but as he wished it to be. The very name allured him. He had long preached of a spiritual Paradise; here was the germ of an earthly one. From rim to rim, from mountain to mesa, it was, to his eyes, a favored valley, fitted for happy homes. The town vanished, and the settlers departed, but the dream remained. The dreamer still saw the possibilities and the beauties—the fruitful soil, the sun-kissed grassy slopes, the alluring blue mountains. And the dream was asso-

ciated with the child; the dreamer, the dream, and the child, were as one, for had not the child brought to the dreamer his first knowledge of this smiling land?

So Wingate remained after the boom bubble broke, encouraging the few sturdy farmers who clung with fondness to the valley. Even when one by one the houses, all but those belonging to the town company, were torn down and borne away, the dream was not shattered. The dreamer became the agent of the company, charged with the care of the remaining houses until the dream should reach again toward fulfillment.

While he waited, the dreamer pictured the joy and devotion with which he would minister to the spiritual needs of the new people, who would love him he knew even as he should love them. And thus waiting, he moved the rounds of his simple life, in the midst of the few, who rewarded his love and zeal with ever-renewed devotion. Even those who cared nothing for religion cared for the religious teacher, and came regularly to hear him preach.

They could not give much to his support; they had not much themselves, but he needed so very little. He had his small stipend from the missionary organization of his denomination, the garden he tended on the low land by the stream yielded well in the favorable seasons, and the missionary barrel filled with clothing which some worthy ladies had sent him from the East two years before had held such a goodly store of cast-off garments that neither he nor the child, a stout boy now, had required anything in

that line since. The shiny, long-tailed coat which he kept so scrupulously clean and which was a world too large for him, and the tight-fitting, ink-spattered sailor suit which the boy wore, had come from the depths of that barrel, which seemed as miraculous in its way as the widow's cruse of oil.

And now, when he had seen no stranger in Paradise for months, and no new face except when he journeyed once a week to preach in the little railroad town at the base of the mountain, there had come this pleasant-voiced man, who spoke well of the prophetic sermon and seemed able to appreciate the promise and future of the land.

When Curtis Clayton returned from his ride night had fallen. The Milky Way had stretched its shining trail across the prairies of the sky, and the Dipper was pouring the clouds out of its great bowl and shaking them from its handle.

Clayton sat looking at the night sky, and as he sat thus the boy came out to put away his horse. Within the house, Wingate, busy with coffee pot and frying pan, directed him to the room he was to occupy, and announced that supper would be ready soon.

At the end of fifteen minutes the boy tapped on Clayton's door. The latch had not caught, and the door flew open. The boy stood in hesitation, looking into the little room, wondering if he had offended. What he beheld puzzled him. Clayton had been burning letters in the tiny stove; and beside the lamp on the little table, with scorched edges still smoking, stood the photograph of a beautiful woman. Clayton had evidently committed it to the

flames, and then relenting had drawn it back. Turning quickly now, when he heard the door moving on its hinges, he caught up the photograph and thrust it hastily into an inner pocket of his coat, but not before the boy had been given a clear view of the pictured face.

Wingate talked of his dream, when grace had been said and the supper was being eaten. The boy thought of the burned letters and of the scorched photograph showing that alluringly beautiful face, and wondered blindly. He saw that the stranger was not listening to the talk of the minister; and observed, too, what the dreamer did not, that the stranger ate very little, and without apparent relish. Though he could not define it, and did not at all understand it, something in the man's face and manner moved him to sympathy.

For that reason, when, after supper, the minister had talked to the end of his dream and was about to begin all over again, the boy slipped away, and returning put a small book into the stranger's hands. Clayton stared at it, then looked up, and for the first time saw the boy. He had already seen a face and form and a sailor suit, but not the boy. Now he looked into the clear open blue eyes, set in an attractive, wind-tanned face. His features lost their grim sadness and he smiled.

"Your son?" he said, speaking to Wingate.

The dreamer showed surprise. He had already spoken to this man of the boy.

"My adopted son, but a real son to me in all but the ties of blood."

The boy drew open the little Bible he had placed in Clayton's hands. Some writing showed on the fly-leaf. The boy's fore-finger fell on the writing.

"My very own mother wrote those words, and my name there—Justin," he announced, reverently.

Clayton looked at the writing, and then again at the boy. The record on the fly-leaf was but a simple memorandum, in faded ink:

"Justin, my baby boy, is now six months old. May God bless and preserve him and may he become a good man."

A date showed, in addition to this, but that was all; not even the mother's name was signed.

"This was in it, too; it is my hair."

The boy pulled the book open at another place and extracted a brown wisp.

"We think it is his hair," said Wingate. "It was found beside the writing on the fly-leaf."

Then while the boy crowded close against Clayton's knees, and Clayton sat holding the open Bible in his hands, Wingate told the story of this child, who now bore the name of Justin Wingate.

"The young fellow who brought him to me said there were some papers, which he had left behind, having forgotten them when he set out, and that he would fetch them later. But he never came again,—he was only a boy, and boys forget—and I even failed to get his name, being somewhat excited at the time, because of the strange charge given to me, a bachelor minister."

Clayton read the words over slowly, and looked intently at the boy.

"It is a good name," he said at length.

The boy took the book and placed the wisp of hair carefully between the pages as he closed it. He was still standing close against the knees of this man, as if he desired to help or comfort him, or longed for a little of the real father love he had never known. But Clayton, after that simple statement, dropped into silence. This absence of speech was not observed by Wingate, who had found in the story of the boy an opportunity to take up again the narrative of his introduction to Paradise and his life there since. Yet the boy noticed. His face flushed slowly; and when Clayton still remained mute and unresponsive, he slipped away, with a choke in his throat.

Shortly afterward he said good night to the visitor, kissed the dreamer on his bearded cheek, and with the Bible still in his hands crept away to bed. Wingate sat up until a late hour, talking of his dream, receiving now and then a monosyllabic assent to some prophetic statement. Having started at last to his room Clayton hesitated on the threshold and turned back.

"As you are the agent of the town company you could let one of those houses, I suppose?" was his unexpected inquiry.

The face of the dreamer flushed with pleasure.

"Most assuredly."

"Then you may consider one of them rented—to me; it doesn't matter which one. I think I should like to stop here awhile."

It was one o'clock and the Sabbath was past. Wingate, his dream more vivid than it had been for

months, sat down at his little writing desk, and in a fever of renewed hope began to pen a letter to the town company, announcing the letting of a house and prophesying an early revival of the boom.

CHAPTER II

WINGATE JOURNEYS ON

JUSTIN WINGATE tip-toed softly to and fro in front of the improvised book shelves and looked at the formidable array of books which, together with some furniture, had arrived for Clayton, and had been brought out from the town. The books were of a different character entirely from those which composed the minister's scanty collection. Justin read the names slowly, without comprehension—"Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy," "Darwin's Origin of Species," "Tyndall's Forms of Water," and hard-worded titles affixed to volumes of the German metaphysicians. There were medical books too, a great many it seemed to the boy, in leather bindings, with gilt titles set in black squares on the backs.

Clayton came in while Justin was tip-toeing before the book shelves. His appearance and manner had changed for the better. He looked at the boy with kindly interest, and was almost cheerful.

"Do you think you would like to become an educated man, Justin?"

The boy's eyes shone.

"I don't know. Would I have to read all of those?"

A smile twitched the corners of Clayton's dark eyes.

"Not all of them at once, and perhaps some of them never. At any rate we wouldn't try to begin so high up as that."

He sat down and began to question the boy concerning his acquirements, and found they were not inconsiderable, for the lonely minister had tried to be faithful to his trust. Except in one line, the Scriptural, the faculty of the imagination had alone been neglected; and that seemed strange, for Peter Wingate was so quiveringly imaginative that he lived perpetually in a dream world which he believed to be real. Justin had never heard of the Greek gods and demi-gods; the brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, the Arabian Nights, were unknown names to him; he had never visited Liliput and the land of the giants with Gulliver, nor even gone sailing romantic seas and living in blissful and lonely exile with Robinson Crusoe and Friday. Yet he knew all the wonderful and attractive stories of the Bible. The friendship of David and Jonathan was as real to him as the love that existed between himself and the minister. He knew the height of Goliath, and had even measured on the ground, with the minister's help, the length of that giant's spear. He had seen the baby Moses drawn from his cradled nest in the bulrushes; had witnessed the breaking pitchers and the flashing lights of Gideon's band; and had watched in awed wonder when, at the command of Joshua, the sun had stopped over Gibeon and the

moon had hung suspended above the valley of Ajalon.

Clayton's dark eyes looked into the blue eyes of the boy as they talked, and the choking ache which had been in his heart when he came to that lonely home in that lonely valley all but ceased.

" You haven't missed so very much after all, Justin. I guess there aren't any better stories than those you know anywhere in the world. But you know them so well now that we will begin on something else."

Stepping to a box he drew out a book. When he came back with it Justin recognized the title, " Robinson Crusoe," for he had once heard the minister mention it in a sermon.

" Is it a story? " he asked, eagerly.

" One of the best stories ever written, I think. It has made boys run away to sea, I've been told, but I don't believe you will be harmed by it in that way. Seven-league boots would be needed to run away to sea from here. So we'll risk reading it."

He sat down and began to read; and the boy, standing close against his knees as on that first night, felt a strange warmth steal through him. He wanted to put his arms around the neck of this man; and when at length Clayton in shifting his position dropped a hand softly on the boy's shoulder and let it rest there as he read on, the inner warmth so increased in the heart of the boy that he could hardly follow the story, fascinating as it was.

What may be called Justin's course of instruction under Clayton began that day, after Clayton had

talked with Wingate and asked the privilege of ordering certain books for Justin. The mail of a few days later brought "Treasure Island."

"A wild book and a bloody one," said Clayton, as he took it from its wrapping, while Justin looked on expectantly, "but a little wildness will be a good thing in this stagnation, and the blood in such a book doesn't hurt a boy who isn't bloody-minded. I think there must have been pirates who went about bludgeoning folks in the days of the cave-dwellers, and certainly books about pirates couldn't have made those fellows what they were."

It was a delight to instruct such a natural, inquisitive, imaginative boy as Justin. And the lessons were not confined to books. Clayton had a little glass which he slipped in and out of his pocket at intervals as he walked about with the boy. Looking through that glass the greenish stuff that appeared on the stones by the margin of the tepid stream was revealed as a beautiful green moss, the tufted head of a dusty weed was seen to be set with white lilies, and tiny specks became strange crawling and creeping things. Suddenly Justin had found that the very air, the earth, even the water in the tepid pools of the stream, swarmed with life, and it was an astonishing revelation. And everywhere was order, and beauty of form and coloring; for even a common rock, broken and viewed through that glass, showed beautiful diamond-like crystals.

One day Clayton plucked the leaf of a weed and holding it beneath the glass let Justin look at it.

"It's covered all over with fuzzy hairs!"

Clayton plucked another of a different kind.

"Isn't it funny? You can't see them, only through the glass, but the edges are spiked, just as if there were little thorns set all along it!"

Clayton sat down, toying with the weeds and the glass.

"What do you suppose those spikes and hairs are for?"

"I don't know."

"Perhaps no one really knows, but men may have theories. See that little moth moving now across the weed blade. He is on the under side, and the hairs help him to hold on. When he reaches the edge and wishes to climb over, the hairs and the spikes help him to do that. That shows, to me at least, that nature provides as completely for a moth as for a man, and that God cares as much for the one as for the other; only man, having a very high opinion of himself, doesn't think so. Aha! Mr. Moth's wings are wet and he is having some trouble; we'll see if we can help him."

He stretched out his hand to turn the grass blade over, and in doing so crushed the moth; it was his half useless left hand, heavy and clumsy. His face flushed as he looked at his crooked arm, and then at the moth, its mail of silver dust smeared over the green, sword-like blade.

"Poor little thing," he said.

He put away the glass and rose, and there was no further lesson that morning.

Sometimes Justin rode forth with him on a visit to the home of a settler. All knew him soon, and

were glad of his coming. That he appeared to have established himself permanently in one of the abandoned houses of the town gave them selfish pleasure, for it was good to have a doctor near.

Often Clayton rode forth alone, spending whole days off in the hills, or on the level lands stretching away from their base. He found Justin always watching for him when he returned, and he never failed to bring home something of interest in the shape of a crystal, a flower, a lichen, or mayhap an abandoned bird's nest, which furnished either a lesson or food for conversation.

Always on his return from any trip, far or near, Wingate questioned him with anxious yearning. Were the farmers still hopeful, what crops looked most promising, did the deceptive clouds about the mountain promise rain, had he seen any land-hunters or white-topped schooners on the trail? And when Clayton had answered, the dreamer talked of his dream. He was sure of its fulfillment some day.

"A baseless dream," thought Clayton; "but all dreams are baseless, gaudy, unsubstantial things, wrought by hope and fancy out of foundationless air, and to shatter his dream would be to shatter his heart."

As he returned one day Clayton beheld in the trail the vanishing wheels of the mail carrier's cart and saw Justin running toward him in great excitement. Quickening the pace of his horse he was soon at the boy's side.

"Father—Mr. Wingate—has—had a fit, or some-

thing. He's lying on the floor and won't speak to me, and I can't lift him."

Clayton leaped from the saddle and rushed into the house, with Justin at his heels. The preacher lay on the floor, with arms spread out. Beneath him was an open letter, across which he had fallen. Clayton made a hurried examination, and with Justin's aid placed him on the low bed. Picking up the letter he glanced at it. It was from the secretary of the town company, and was apparently an answer to one which Wingate had sent:

"Mr. Peter Wingate.

"My Dear Sir:—We regret that we cannot view the prospects of the town and valley of Paradise as hopefully as you do. In fact we have concluded to abandon it definitely and permanently, and to that end we have sold all the buildings. The agent of the purchaser will visit you at once and make arrangements for their removal.

"Very truly yours,

"Royce Gilbert,

"Secretary Paradise Land and Town Company."

"Is he—very sick?" wailed the boy anxiously.

Clayton dropped the letter to the floor, and swinging about in his chair drew Justin to him, pressing him close against his heart. There were tears in his eyes and his voice choked.

"Justin," he said, "you will need to be a very brave boy now; Mr. Wingate is dead."

CHAPTER III

CLAYTON'S VISITORS

WHEN jack-screws and moving teams had done their work in the town of Paradise but one house remained, the minister's, and that only because Curtis Clayton had purchased it and moved into it, with Justin. The farmers of the valley wondered that he should remain, but tempered their surprise with gratitude.

He and Justin seemed even more closely linked now. But not even to Justin did he ever speak of why he had come to the valley or why he tarried. The coming appeared to have been a thing of chance, as when a batted ball rolling to some obscure corner of the field stops there because no force is applied to move it farther. If there was any observable change in him after Wingate's death, it was that he became more restless. The mind of the dreamer, in its workings somewhat akin to his own, yet with a simple faith which he did not possess, had soothed and rested him.

Clayton wore out his increased restlessness by long walks with Justin, abandoning the rides apparently because he disliked to leave the boy alone. But his fame as a doctor was spreading through the thinly-settled country, and when forced away from

home by calls he left Justin at the house of some farmer, usually that of Sloan Jasper, for there the boy found pleasant companionship in the person of Mary Jasper, a dark-eyed girl, with winning, mischievous ways and cheeks like wild rose petals. Time never hung heavily with Justin at Sloan Jasper's.

In addition to his work of instructing Justin, and his reading, Clayton spent much time in writing, in the little room which the minister had fitted up as a study. Sometimes Justin was given the privilege of dusting this room, and once when so engaged he whisked from the table the scorched photograph he had seen before. Clayton had evidently been looking at it, had placed it under a large blotter, and then had neglected to put it away before admitting Justin. The boy stared intently into the beautiful face shadowed forth on that bit of cardboard, for he wondered; then he replaced it beneath the blotter and resumed his dusting. But a question had arisen in his heart.

To give Justin pleasant occupation and make the time pass more rapidly, Clayton purchased a few sheep and placed the boy over them as a herder; and, as if to furnish diversion for himself, he assisted Justin in building a sod-walled corral and sod shelters for the sheep.

It was a delight to Justin to guard the sheep on the grassy slopes and drive them to the tepid water-holes. Often he did this in company with Mary Jasper; he on foot, or high on Clayton's horse, the rosy-cheeked girl swaying at his side on her lazy

gray burro, which she had to beat continually with a small cudgel if she progressed at all.

Once Clayton remonstrated with her for what he deemed her cruelty to the beast.

"Doctor Clayton," she said severely, wrinkling her small forehead, " the only way to make this critter go is to kill him; that's what my paw says!" and she swayed on, pounding the burro's back with the stick and kicking his sides energetically with her bare heels.

Yet the valley life was lonely, so that the coming of any one was an event; and it was a red-letter day when Lemuel Fogg drifted in with his black-topped, wine-colored photograph wagon, and William Sanders with his dirty prairie schooner. Fogg was a fat young man, whose mustache drooped limply over a wide good-humored mouth, and whose round face was splotched yellow with large freckles. Sanders was even younger than Fogg. He lacked Fogg's buoyancy and humor, had shrewd little gray eyes that peered and pried, and slouched about in shabby ill-fitting clothing. Clayton gave them both warm welcome, and they remained with him over night.

Sanders, who was alone in his wagon, was looking for land on which to settle. Apparently Fogg's present business was to take photographs, and he began by taking one of Justin standing in the midst of his sheep, with Mary Jasper sitting on her burro beside him, her bare feet and ankles showing below her dusty gray dress.

In addition to the land, which he looked over carefully with his shrewd little eyes, Sanders cast

furtive glances at Clayton's stiff arm. He ventured to word a question, when he and Fogg sat with Justin and Clayton in the little study after supper, surrounded by Clayton's books and papers, while the sheep were securely housed in the sod corral and the unrelenting wind piped insistently round the house.

"'Tain't any my business as I know of," he began, apologetically, "but I can't help lookin' at that arm o' your'n, and wonderin' what made it so. I had my fortune told onc't by a man who had an arm like that, and he said a tiger bit it. He was an East Injun, er a Malay, I reckon. It come to me that you might have met with an accident sometime, er somethin' er 'nuther? There's a story about it, I reckon?"

The blood rushed in a wave to Clayton's face and appeared to suffuse even his dark eyes. He did not answer the question, being sensitive on the subject, and deeming it an impertinence.

Sanders waited a time, while Fogg talked; then he returned to his inquiry, with even greater emphasis.

"Yes, there is a story," said Clayton, speaking slowly, after a moment of hesitation, while a ghastly smile took the attractiveness out of his thoughtful countenance. "It wasn't an accident, though."

"No?" said Sanders.

"The thing was done in cool deliberation. I was in college, in a medical college, for I'm a doctor you know. I was a student then; and it was the custom among the students to perform various operations on each other, by way of practice, so that when we went out from there to begin our work we would know

how things should be done. One day I sawed a student's skull open, took out a spoonful of his brains, and sewed the wound up so nicely that he was well in a week. The operation was a great success, but I dipped a little too deep and took out too much of the gray matter, and after that he was always omitting something or other that he should have remembered. In return for what he had permitted me to do he put me on the operating table one day, broke my arm with a mallet, and then proceeded to put it together again. In doing so he omitted the funny bone, and my arm has been this way ever since."

Fogg broke into a roar of laughter. Sanders flushed slowly; and getting up walked to the other end of the room, chewing wrathfully, splintering the story with his teeth as he splintered the grass blades that he plucked and chewed when walking about to view the valley land.

"Huh!" he grunted, coming back and dropping lumpily into his chair. "Tell that to a fool an' mebbe you'll git a fool to believe ye, but I don't!"

Fogg slapped his fat knee and roared again.

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Ask him something else, Sanders! Who-ee! Doc, I didn't think it was in you! If you do anything like that again I'll have to let a reef out of the band of my trousers. Fire another question at him, Sanders."

"No," said Sanders, while a sullen fire glowed in his little eyes; "I was goin' to ask him some other things, but I'm done!"

Then he chewed again, tried hard to laugh, and

seemed about to say something; but Fogg broke in.

"I say, Doc, you can tell a story so well you'd ought to be in my line. Story telling is my long suit. Lincoln ought to have altered his immortal saying before giving it to the world. My experience is that if you keep the people in a good humor you can fool *all* of them *all* of the time, and there ain't any better way than by feeding them anecdotes and jollying them until they think they are the smartest ever. For instance, Sanders believes in fortune tellers; they jolly him, and that pleases him, and they get his coin. It's the same way with everything and everybody."

In addition to the photographic apparatus stored in the wine-colored wagon Fogg had a collection of Navajo blankets, Pueblo pottery, Indian baskets, bows and arrows, and such things. Seeing that his host was not to be a purchaser, and being in a communicative mood, he did not hesitate to expose now the secrets of his trade, in proof of his view of the gullibility of the general public.

"See that," he said, taking up a hideous image of Pueblo workmanship. "Ninety men out of a hundred will believe that thing, with its froggy mouth, is a Pueblo idol, without you telling them, and the others will believe it when you do tell them."

"Huh!" grunted Sanders, still angry; "if 'tain't an Injun idol, what is it?"

It seemed natural for Fogg to laugh, and he laughed again, with easy gurgling.

"You may call it anything you want to, but it ain't an idol. I've seen Pueblo idols; there's a room

full of them in the old Governor's Palace in Santa Fé, and they look more than anything else like stone fence posts with holes gouged near one end for the eyes, nose and mouth. Them are genuine old Pueblo idols, but you bet the Pueblos didn't sell them, and they didn't give 'em away. Did you ever know of a people that would sell their God? I never did."

"None, except Christians!" said Clayton, speaking slowly, but with emphasis.

Fogg set the staring image on the table and looked at him.

"I hadn't thought of that. Yes, I reckon they do, a good deal of the time. But an Indian wouldn't; he would never sell his God. Maybe it's because Christians think so little of theirs that they're so ready to believe a Pueblo will sell his for 'most any old thing. Them images are just caricatures, made to sell. I go among the Pueblos three or four times a year and buy up a lot of their pottery, and I encourage them to make these images, which the average tourist thinks are gods, for they sell better even than the water jars and other things that they turn out.

"Then I buy blankets of the Navajos, which they make dirt cheap now. I helped to put 'em onto that. You can sell a dozen cheap blankets easier than a single expensive one, especially when the people you're selling to think they're getting the genuine goods at a bargain. It's easier for the Navajo weavers to tear old government blankets to pieces and re-weave them and color them with analine dyes than it is for them to take their own wool and their

own dyes and put the things together in the old way. They won't wear of course, and the colors fade, but they sell like hot cakes.

"I buy for a dealer, who snaps up everything of the kind I can bring him and hollers for more. You ought to see the crowds of people, especially tourists, who wear out his floors. I'm going to have a store of that kind myself some day. I take photographs for him, of scenery and other things that will sell; and bring him loads of basket work and bows and arrows from the Jicarilla Apaches just over the New Mexican line. He grabs for the Jicarilla work, which I can get almost cheaper than anybody, for I know the head men. The Jicarillas used to be slow workers and too honest, like the Navajo weavers; but they're onto their job now, and can put a willow basket together and dye it with patent dyes in almost no time."

Thus Lemuel Fogg discoursed of his business methods, until he had succeeded in proving several things concerning himself, in addition to his easy belief that the whole world is either covetous or dishonest.

Fogg departed the next morning, on his way to Denver. Sanders lingered in the valley for two or three days, peeking and prying, at intervals visiting a fortune teller of local repute in the town, who saw land, houses, and cattle for him, in the grounds of a coffee cup. But he was angered against Clayton and did not return to his house. A dozen times he told inquiring farmers that he "reckoned" he would

take land there and become one of them. But the grounds in the coffee cup did not settle just right, and at length he, too, departed.

CHAPTER IV

SIBYL

ONE day there came, across the level lands, a wave of horsemen and hounds in a rabbit hunt, the baying of the dogs breaking sharply on the peaceful calm of the valley. Justin rushed from the house when he heard the clamor. Clayton followed more slowly, and looked across the valley from his doorway. The flutter of skirts told him that some of the saddles bore women. He frowned. This slaughter of rabbits was particularly distasteful to him, though he knew that the few farmers on the low land by the stream would welcome it, if the horses and dogs did not cut up the cultivated fields.

Big gray jack rabbits, routed from their coverts, were bobbing on in advance of the baying hounds and galloping riders. More rabbits were seen to start up, bouncing out of bunches of grass or scattered clumps or sage. Following behind, driven at a lively gait, came a mule team, drawing a light spring wagon into which the slain rabbits were thrown.

The extended line had advanced in a big semicircle; and the ends bending in, the chase drew on toward the solitary home of the solitary doctor. Justin was filled with excitement. The lust of

killing, which seems to be in the racial blood, stirred strongly within him, and was only held in partial leash by certain teachings and admonitions well hammered in by his instructor. Suddenly, quite carried away, he swung his hat and yelled:

"Mary is on one of those horses! See her, out there on the right side, on the white horse! She must have been at the station and joined them when they started."

Clayton drew back from the doorway without a glance at the form of Mary Jasper borne onward with flying leaps. A rush of disgust shook him, so that he did not care to look longer. But Justin remained outside, swinging his hat and whooping at intervals, quite taken out of himself.

Then a louder clamor, and a cry from Justin, drew Clayton to the door again. One of the rabbits was approaching the house, springing on with indescribable swiftness, yet unable either by running or dodging to shake off the pursuit of the lithe-limbed, baying creatures that cleft the air behind it. Two of the foremost of the hounds were in chase of this rabbit, one twenty yards in advance of the other. Pushed hard, the rabbit crouched and dodged again with such celerity that the hound, whose open mouth at the instant was almost closing on it, was thrown headlong in a frantic effort to stop and turn as quickly as the rabbit itself. The second hound rushed at it, and the change of direction flung the fleeing rabbit upon the bit of trampled grass in front of the open door in which Clayton stood.

It saw the opening, and in desperation darted into

it as into a cave, whisking past Clayton's legs. The hound came close after, yelping fiendishly. With an exclamation that sounded like an oath, Clayton kicked at it; but the hound almost overthrew him, leaped into the house, and he heard the rabbit's death cry, and a crunching of bones as the dog's ponderous jaws closed on its quivering body.

Then Clayton heard a pounding of hoofs, and with eyes blazing wrathfully he looked up, and saw the original of the photograph which he had hurled into the fire and then had drawn out and treasured as if he could not bear to part with it. The blood receded from his face, leaving it livid and ghastly.

"Sibyl!" he exclaimed.

The woman drew up her horse in front of the door through which the dog had darted. She saw the man, and her clutch of the rein tightened. Clayton looked up at her, and, standing in the doorway, while the dog, having completed its bloody work panted out past him with furious haste, he put his strong right hand against the side of the door, with a faltering motion, as if he felt the need of aid to sustain him from falling.

The woman sitting there on her chafing horse stared back at him, while the clamor of the hounds broke over them. Her face had flushed more than even the excitement of the chase warranted; yet he knew she was marvellously beautiful, as he looked at her full rounded throat and chin, at her olive cheeks in which dimples nestled, and into her great dark eyes, that held now a surprised light. Her hair was as dark as her eyes, and even though much hid-

den beneath her riding hat, it was still a crown of glory. Clayton saw only enough of the blue riding habit to know that it became her; his eyes were drawn to her face.

"Are you living here?" she asked in astonishment, giving a glance at the small house.

"Yes," he answered huskily. "I thought it as good a place as any, and out of the world; but it seems you found your way here. And Death came riding with you, as usual."

"Curtis, you're always ridiculous when you say foolish things! I've been wondering where you were. You don't intend to return to Denver?"

"No."

"Not even if I wanted you to?"

She looked at him with her fascinating unfathomable eyes, noting his manly presence, his clear-cut dark features, and the stiff, awkward left arm. As she did so the color flamed back into his face.

"No! Not unless—"

"Unless I would consent to be as poky as you are!"

"No, not that. I shouldn't expect you to take an interest in the things I do. You never did, but I didn't care for that."

He stopped as if in hesitation and stood trembling.

"Well, I'm glad I've found where you're living. I suppose your post office address is the town over there by the side of the mountain, where the station is? I shall have something to send you by mail by and by."

"Yes, my mail comes to the station post office."

He still trembled and appeared to hesitate.

"It's queer, how I happened to find you here, isn't it? I have an acquaintance in that little town, and she invited me down the other day. Some other strangers to the place chanced to be there, and this rabbit hunt was gotten up for our entertainment."

"A queer form of entertainment!" he observed, with caustic emphasis.

"To you I suppose it isn't anything short of murder?"

"It's strange to me how any one can find pleasure in it."

"I suppose that is as one looks at it. But I must be going. I don't care to have people see us talking too long together. I'm glad, though, that I found you."

"Good bye!" he said, his lips bloodless again.

She pulled her horse sharply about, and in another moment was galloping on in the hunt, leaving him standing in the doorway staring after her. He stood thus until the clamor of the dogs sounded faint and she became a mere swaying speck, then he turned back into the house. Justin came in at his heels. He had seen the woman and recognized the pictured face of the photograph.

"Take the rabbit out and bury it somewhere, Justin," said Clayton wearily.

Then he passed on into his study and closed the door behind him.

A few days later the mail carrier brought him a Denver newspaper of ancient date with ink lines

drawn round a divorce notice. The paper had been sent to his address by Sibyl. Clayton read the marked notice carefully, and thrusting the paper into the stove touched a lighted match to it.

CHAPTER V

THE INVASION OF PARADISE

LEMUEL FOGG made other visits to Paradise Valley, as the seasons came and went, and Justin learned to look forward with pleasure to his coming. Always he stayed over night, and talked long with Clayton, for whom he had conceived a liking.

Clayton continued to cling to his lonely home. Though more than once tempted to depart he had never been able to make up his mind to do so. He averred to Fogg, and to other acquaintances, that, having been dropped down into Paradise Valley quite by chance, mental and physical inertia held him there; he was lazy, he said, and the indolent life of Paradise Valley had strong attraction for him.

Yet, as his reputation as an excellent doctor spread, he often rode many weary miles to visit a patient. Always the studies went on, and the writing, and the little glass slipping out of and into his pocket made the whole earth radiant with life and beauty. And Justin became a stalwart lad, whose strong handsome face, earnest blue eyes, and attractive personality, won new friends and held old ones.

The few farmers who remained had learned well some lessons with the passing of the years. Ceasing

to rely on the uncertain rainfall, they had decreased the areas of their tilled fields and pushed them close to the stream, where the low-lying soil was blest with sufficient sub-irrigation to swell the deep tap-roots of the alfalfa. They kept small herds of cattle, and some sheep, which they grazed on the bunch grass. The few things they had to sell, honey rifled from the alfalfa blooms by the bees, poultry, eggs and butter, they found a market for in the town, or shipped to Denver.

Sloan Jasper was of those who remained, and Mary, a tall girl now, had taken the place of her mother in the farmer's home. Mrs. Jasper had given up the struggle with hard climatic conditions, and had passed on, attended in her last illness by the faithful doctor.

With Lemuel Fogg there came, one day, a ranchman named Davison; and in their wake followed herds of bellowing, half-wild cattle, and groups of brisk-riding, shouting cowboys, who rode down the fields in the moist soil by the stream, as they galloped in pursuit of their refractory charges.

The advent of the cattle and the cowboys, the establishment of the Davison ranch, the erection of houses and bunk-rooms, stables and corrals, filled Justin's life to the brim with excitement. He fraternized with the cowboys, and struck up a warm friendship with Philip Davison's son Ben, a lively young fellow older than himself, who could ride a horse not only like a cowboy, but like a circus athlete, for he could perform the admirable feat of standing in the saddle with arms folded across his

breast while his well-trained broncho tore around the new corral at a gallop.

When the other members of the Davison household came and were domiciled in the new ranch house, Justin found that Lucy Davison, the ranchman's niece, the "cousin" of whom Ben had talked, was a beautiful girl of Mary's age, with more than Mary's charm of manner. She was paler than Mary, and had not her rose-leaf cheeks, but she was more beautiful in her way, and she had something which Mary lacked. Justin did not know what it was, for he was not yet analytical, but he was interested in a wholly new manner. He could not be with her enough, and when he was absent thoughts of her filled his mind and even his dreams.

Mary Jasper hastened to call on Lucy Davison; and in doing so made the acquaintance of that most interesting person, Miss Pearl Newcome, Davison's housekeeper. Miss Newcome had passed the beauty stage, if indeed she had ever dwelt at all in that delectable period which should come by right to every member of the sex; but she still cherished the romantic illusions of her earlier years, and kept them embalmed, as it were, in sundry fascinating volumes, which were warded and locked in her trunk up stairs. She brought these out at pshychological moments, smelling sweetly of cedar and moth balls, and read from them, to Mary's great delight; for there never were such charming romances in the world, and never will be again, no matter who writes them. Some of them were in the form of pamphlets, yellow and falling to pieces; others were in creaky-

backed books; and still others, and these the most read, in cunning bindings of Miss Newcome's own contriving.

Sitting on the flat lid of the trunk, with one foot tucked under her for comfort, while Mary crouched on the floor with her rose-leaf cheeks in her palms, Pearl Newcome would read whole chapters from "Fanny the Flower Girl, or the Pits and Pitfalls of London," from "Lady Clare, or Lord Marchmont's Unhappy Bride," from "The Doge's Doom, or the Mysterious Swordsman of Venice," and many others. The mysterious swordsman in the "Doge's Doom" was especially entrancing, for he went about at night with a black mask over his face, and made love and fought duels with the greatest imaginable nonchalance. It taxed the memory merely to keep count of his many loves and battles, and it was darkly hinted that he was a royal personage in disguise.

"The Black Mask's scabbard clanked ominously as he sprang from the gondola to the stone arches below the sombre building, while the moonlight was reflected from his shining coat of mail and from the placid waters of the deep lagoon, showing in the pellucid waves alike the untamed locks that hung about his shoulders and the white frightened face of the slender, golden-haired maiden who leaned toward him with palpitating bosom from the narrow, open window above him."

When that point was reached Mary clasped her hands tightly across her knees and rocked in aching excitement; for who was to know whether the Black Mask would succeed in getting the lovely maiden out

of the clutches of the foul doge who held her a prisoner, or whether some guard concealed in a niche in the wall would not pounce out, having been set there by the shrewd doge for the purpose, and slice the Black Mask's head off, in spite of the protecting coat of mail?

Aside from her duties as housekeeper, which she never neglected, there was one other thing that could cause Pearl Newcome to surrender voluntarily the joys of that perch on the trunk lid in the midst of her redolent romances with Mary Jasper for an appreciative listener, and that was the voice of Steve Harkness, the ranch foreman. The attraction of the printed page palled when she heard Harkness's heavy tones, and stopping, with her finger between the leaves, she would step to the window; and sometimes, to Mary's regret, would go down stairs, where she would cut out a huge triangle of pie and place it on the kitchen table.

Harkness was big and jovial, and in no manner resembled the Black Mask, who was slender, lithe, had a small supple wrist, hair of midnight blackness, and "a voice like the tinkle of many waters." Harkness's voice was big and heavy, and his wrist was large and red. But he was usually clean-shaven, scented himself sweetly with cinnamon drops, and was altogether very becoming, in the eyes of Pearl Newcome. And she knew he liked pie. Sometimes Pearl came back to the trunk and continued the dropped romance. That was when Harkness was in a hurry and could not linger in the kitchen to joke and laugh with her. But if time chanced to hang

heavily on his hands and no troublesome cowboy or refractory steer claimed his attention, she did not return at all, and Mary, tired of waiting, crept down in disappointment.

Delightful as Mary Jasper and Justin Wingate found the people of the new ranch, Curtis Clayton secluded himself more than ever with his books and his writing, and was not to be coaxed out of his shell even by Justin's stories of Ben's marvellous acrobatic and equestrian feats and of Lucy's brightness and clever talk.

Yet he was drawn out one day, by a summons that could not be disobeyed. Harkness had been hurled against the new wire corral by a savage broncho, and Clayton's services as a surgeon were demanded. He never refused a call like that.

He found Harkness sitting in the kitchen of the ranch house, to which he had come as to a shelter, with Pearl Newcome bending over him, a camphor bottle in one of her hands and a blood-stained cloth in the other. Davison, Fogg, and several cowboys, stood about in helpless awkwardness. Harkness's face looked white and faint, in spite of its red tan. The sleeve of his flannel shirt had been rolled to the shoulder and a bloody bandage was wound round the arm.

" Nothin' to make a fuss about," he said, when he saw Clayton. " I got slung up ag'inst the barbed wire and my arm was ripped open. It's been bleedin' some, but that's good fer it."

" I shall have to take a number of stitches," Clayton announced, when he had examined and cleansed

the wound. He opened a pouch of his saddle-bags.

"No chloryform ner anything of that kind fer me," said Harkness, regarding him curiously. "Jist go ahead with your sewin'."

Clayton obeyed; while Harkness, setting a lighted cigarette between his teeth, talked and laughed with apparent nonchalance.

Brought thus into close contact with the people of the ranch, the shell of Clayton's exclusiveness was shattered. After that, daily, for some time, he rode or walked over to the ranch house to see how his patient was doing, or Harkness came over to see him. And he found that these people were good to know. They lessened the emptiness which had gnawed. They were human beings, with wholly human hearts. And he needed them quite as much as they needed him.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN LOVE WAS YOUNG

JUSTIN shot up into a tall youth; he was beginning to feel that he was almost a man; and love had come to him, as naturally and simply as the bud changes into the flower. It flushed his face, as he came with Lucy Davison up the path to the arbor seat in the cottonwoods, after a stroll by the stream. Planted when the ranch was established, the trees were now a cool and screening grove. Justin had made for her a crown of the cottonwood leaves, and had set it on her brown hair. As they walked along, hand in hand, he looked at her now and then, with the light of young love in his eyes. He was sure he had never seen a girl so beautiful and it gave him a strange and delightful pleasure just to look at her.

"Tell me more about Doctor Clayton," she said, dropping down upon the arbor seat. "You told me about that scorched photograph. What is that woman to him, anyway?"

"I don't know," he said, as he sat down by her.

"I think she must have been his sweetheart."

"Just because he couldn't burn her picture?"

"Because he came down here in that queer way and has stayed here ever since. Something happened to separate them."

"If that is so I ought to be sorry, I suppose, but

I can't; it was a good thing for me; it kept me here, and gave me a chance to—get an education."

"And we do need a doctor here," she said, with unnecessary emphasis.

"If he hadn't come, I'm afraid I should have been sent away when Mr. Wingate died, and then I shouldn't ever have—met you."

"Oh, you might have!" she declared, tossing her crowned head coquettishly.

She crumpled a cottonwood leaf in her fingers. With a boldness that gripped his throat he slipped his hand along the back of the arbor seat.

"And if—if I had never met you?"

"Then you wouldn't have known me!"

"No, I suppose not; but, as you said, I might have; it seems to me that something would have drawn me to you, wherever you were."

The hot color dyed her fair cheeks. Her brown eyes dropped and were veiled by their dark lashes. A strand of the brown hair blown in a tangle across the oval of her face, the delicate curve of the white throat, the yielding touch of her body as he pressed his extended arm close up against it, intoxicated his youthful senses.

"I don't want to think how it would have been if I had never known you," he declared earnestly. "We have been good friends a long time, Lucy."

"We're good friends now, aren't we?"

"Yes, but I want it to be something more than just friends."

He pressed his arm closer about her and bent toward her.

"I hope you won't mind my saying it; but I do love you, and have from—from the very first. I didn't understand so well what it meant then, but now I know—I know that I love you, and love you, and love you!" The arm tightened still more. "And—and if you would only say that you love me, too, and that—"

She lifted her face to his. A dash of tears shone in the brown eyes.

"I—I have—hurt your feelings!"

"No, Justin."

The sight of those tears, and her tremulous lips, so moved him that, with an impulsive motion, and a courage he would not have thought posssible, he stooped and kissed her.

"If you would only say that you do love me," he urged.

"I do love you, Justin," she said, with girlish earnestness, "and you ought to know that I do."

"I have always dreamed of this," he declared, putting both arms about her and drawing her close against his heart. "I have always dreamed of this; that we might love each other, and be always together. I think that has been in my heart since the day I first saw you."

He held her tightly now, as if thus he would keep her near him forever.

"Have you truly loved me always?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Always; ever since I knew you!"

"But you—you did care for Mary, before I came?"

"I always liked Mary."

"And you like her now?"

"Yes, but I love you; and that is very different."

She sat quite still, but picked at the leaf of the cotton wood. He seemed so strong and so masterful that the touch of his hands and the pressure of his arms gave her a delightful sense of weakness and dependence, a hitherto unknown feeling.

"You never cared for Mary as—as you do me?"

"I truly never loved Mary at all; I liked her, and we used to have great fun together. But we were only children then, you know!"

She saw one of the hands that enfolded her; the sleeve of his coat was drawn up slightly, disclosing the clear white of the skin and the deep line of tan at the wrist. She ventured to look at his face—the side of it turned toward her; it was as tanned as his hand. Something more than admiration shone in her brown eyes.

"And now you think you are a big man!"

"I am older," he said, simply.

"And was that—that the reason why you tamed my mustang that day, so that he wouldn't be killed? Because you loved me? I've wondered about that."

"That was the reason; but I was anxious, too, to save him."

She was silent again, as if pondering this.

"I've thought that might be the reason; and, you won't laugh at me if I tell you, that's why I've ridden him so much since. Uncle Philip didn't want me to go near him after that. But I would; and I've rid-

den him ever since; though Pearl has told me a dozen times that he would throw me and kill me. But I was going to ride him if I could, because—because you conquered him—for me."

He kissed her again, softly.

"You musn't take too many risks with the mustang; for—for some time, you know, you are going to marry me, I hope?"

She did not answer.

"It's a long way off, that some time, but—"

She did not look at him.

"Yes, some time, if I can," she said timidly.

"If you can?"

"If Uncle Philip will let me."

"He's only your guardian, and you'll be of age by and by."

"It seems a good while yet."

"But it will come."

"Yes, it will come."

"I'll wait until that some time," he promised in a low voice.

Time sped swiftly beneath the cottonwoods. To the boy and girl in the morning glow of love hours are minutes. They did not know they had so many things to talk over. Every subject was colored with a new light and had a new relationship. But love itself was uppermost, on their lips and in their hearts.

Justin bore away from that arbor seat a conflicting sense of exaltation and unworthiness. The warm inner light that illumined him flowed out upon the world and brightened it. He walked with a sense

of buoyancy. There was a tang in the air and a glow in the sky before unknown.

Meeting Ben Davison he had a new sense of comradeship with him; and though Ben talked of the young English setter he had recently purchased, and sought to show off the good points of the dog, Justin was thinking of Ben himself, who was a cousin to Lucy, and now shared in some degree her superior merits.

Also, when Philip Davison came out of the ranch house and walked toward the horse corrals, the glance of his blue eyes seemed brighter and kindlier, his manner more urbane and noble, and the simple order he gave to Ben concerning work to be done fell in kindlier tone. Though Davison's words bit like acid sometimes, Justin was resolved now to remember always that he was Lucy's uncle and guardian.

Walking homeward, Justin looked now and then at the ranch house. He had seen Lucy flutter into it like a bird; she was in that house now, he reflected, brightening it with her presence. The house, the grounds, and more than all the cottonwood grove, became sacred.

CHAPTER VII

WILLIAM SANDERS

THE feeling which hallowed the mere local surroundings of love held its place tenaciously in Justin's heart and seemed not likely to pass away. It was no sickly sentimentality, but had the power to strengthen his inner life and add to his growing manliness.

Justin was employed on the ranch now, and though there were many distasteful things connected with the work, he desired to remain, because it gave him so many opportunities to be near Lucy Davison. The necessary cruelties connected with the rearing and handling of cattle on a great range sickened him at times; for a love that was almost a worship of all life, the lower forms equally with the higher, had been instilled by Clayton into every fibre of his being. To Justin now even the elements seemed to stir with consciousness. Did not certain chemicals exhibited by Clayton rush together into precipitates and crystals, as if they loved and longed to be united, and did not so common a thing as fire throw out tentacles of flame, and grapple with the wood as if hungry? And who was to say that the precipitates and crystals and the fire did not know? Certainly not ignorant man.

With this love of every form of life there grew a manly gentleness, broken strangely at times by outbursts of temper, so that often it seemed whimsical.

Riding forth one day, in cowboy attire, along the line fence that held in the cattle from the cultivated valley lands, he came upon Philip Davison engaged in angry controversy with a young man of somewhat shabby appearance. The shrewd little eyes of this man observed Justin closely. Beside the fence was a dirty prairie schooner, from which the man had descended, and to it two big raw-boned farm horses were hitched. Eyeing Justin the man pushed back his hat, then awkwardly extended his hand.

"So you're Justin, air ye—the little boy I met onc't? I reckon you don't know me? I wouldn't knowed you, but fer hearin' the name."

Justin acknowledged that the man's face was unfamiliar.

"Well, I'm William Sanders!" He plucked a spear of grass and began to splinter it with his teeth. "I landed hyer some seasons ago with Mr. Fogg, and stayed all night with the doctor over there. Mebbe you'll remember me now. I've thought of you a good many times sense then. You've growed a lot. I was thinkin' about you t'other day while on my way hyer; and a fortune teller I went to in Pueblo picked you out straight off, from the cards she told with. She showed me the jack of hearts, and said that was the young feller I had in mind. Sing'lar, wasn't it?"

Justin recalled this young man now, and shook his hand heartily.

"It was singular," he admitted.

"We'll have to talk over old times by and by," said Sanders, amiably.

But Davison was not pleased to see Sanders, whom he had never met before. Sanders, it appeared, had bought a quarter-section of land not far from the stream, and had now come to occupy it. Trouble had arisen over the fact that it was included in a large area of mortgaged and government land which Davison had fenced for his cattle. Sanders was demanding that he should cut the fence.

"Cut it and let me git my land," he insisted, "er I'll cut it fer ye. I know my rights under the law."

"You can't farm there, and you know you can't," said Davison, in a tone of expostulation. "This is simply a piece of blackmail. You want me to pay you not to trouble me about the fence. But I won't do it. If I did I'd have dozens of men landed on me demanding the same thing. You know that nothing but bunch grass will grow on that land."

Though he chewed placidly on the grass spear, Sanders' little eyes glittered.

"Cut the fence and let me git to my land, er I'll cut it fer ye!"

His love for Lucy, which extended now to Philip Davison as a warm regard and intense boyish admiration, would have inclined Justin to the ranchman's side; but it was clear that Sanders was in the right and Davison in the wrong.

"I'll see you again, Mr. Sanders," he said; and rode on while the two men were still wrangling. It was remarkable, he thought, that Sanders should

have remembered him so long, and more remarkable that a fortune teller who had never seen him should be able to describe him even in a dim and uncertain way.

Farther along he encountered Ben, ranging the mesa with dog and gun, training his young English setter. It was Ben's duty to ride the line on this particular day; but Ben had shirked, and Justin had been assigned to his place. The current opinion of the cowboys was that Ben was shiftless and unreliable.

"What's that hayseed mouthing about?" Ben asked.

"He has bought some land in there, and wants your father to cut the fence so that he can get to it."

"These farmers are always making trouble," Ben growled.

Then his face flushed.

"Why didn't you stand up with me against that granger the other day, when I told him that his horses, and not ours, had damaged his crops?"

Justin desired to think well of Ben and remain on terms of friendship with him because of Lucy.

"I couldn't very well," he urged, "for I saw our horses in his millet, myself."

"Well, *he* didn't; he was in town that day. He would have believed you, if you had said they were his horses. You might have backed me up, instead of flinching; I'd have done as much for you."

"You've got a handsome dog there!" said Justin.

"Oh, that setter's going to be fine when I get him broke," Ben asserted, with enthusiasm. "I only

wish we had some Eastern quails here. Harkness put you on this line today, did he? I wanted to train my setter; so I told him I wasn't well, and slipped out of it."

As the dog was now far ahead, Ben hastened to overtake him, and Justin rode on, thinking of Ben, of Lucy, and of William Sanders. Ben's easy disregard of certain things he had been taught to consider essentials troubled him. He wanted to think well of Ben.

When Justin learned the outcome of the controversy between Davison and Sanders he was somewhat astonished. Sanders' truculence had made him think the man would persist in his demands; but Sanders had agreed to fence his own land, if Davison would but give him a right of way to it.

Within a week Justin understood why. Sanders, visiting the ranch-house to see Davison, had also seen Lucy. He became a familiar visitor, where his presence was not desired. If Lucy rode out, William Sanders invariably chanced to be in the trail going in the same direction. If she remained at home he came to the house to get Davison's advice as to the best manner of constructing a fence, and Lucy's advice concerning the proper furnishing of a dug-out for a single man who expected to live alone and do his own cooking.

Lucy came to Justin with the burden of her woes.

"He follows me round all the time, just as if he were my dog!"

"You ought to feel flattered," said Justin, though

he was himself highly indignant. "I don't suppose you want me to say anything to him about it?"

"Oh, no—no!" she gasped, terrified by the threat concealed behind the words.

"I've noticed he hasn't come near me since our meeting down by the line fence. He told me then that he wanted to have a talk about old times, but he hasn't seemed in any hurry to begin it."

As Justin rode away in an angry mood Lucy Davison looked at his receding figure with some degree of uneasiness. Justin had on a few occasions showed a decidedly inflammable temper. Ordinarily mild in word and manner, borrowing much of that mildness doubtless from Clayton, when he gave way to a sudden spasm of rage it was likely to carry him beyond the bounds of reason.

The provocation came in a most unexpected, and at the time inexplicable, way. Justin, riding along the trail by the stream, saw Lucy come out from the shadows of the young cottonwoods near Sloan Jasper's and walk in his direction, as if to join him. The sight of her there filled his sky with brightness and the music of singing birds. He pricked up his broncho and turned it from the trail.

As he did so he beheld William Sanders appear round the end of the cottonwood grove, mounted on one of his big, raw-boned horses. Riding up to Lucy, Sanders slipped from his saddle and walked along by her side. Justin's anger burned. It was apparent to him, great as was the separating distance, that Sanders' presence and words were distasteful to her. She stopped and seemed about to

turn back to the grove. Justin saw Sanders put out his hand as if to detain her. As he did so she stooped; then she screamed, and fell forward, apparently to avoid him.

Justin drove his broncho from a trot into a wild gallop. His anger increased to smoking rage. It passed to ungovernable fury, when he beheld Sanders catch the screaming girl in his arms, lift her to the back of his horse, and scramble up behind her in the saddle. Justin yelled at him.

"Stop—stop, you villain!"

In utter disregard of him and his shouted command Sanders plunged his spurs into the flanks of his big horse, and began to ride away from the cottonwoods at top speed. Lucy lay limp in his arms.

"I'll have his life!" Justin cried, longing now for one of the cowboy revolvers he had made it a practice, on the advice of Clayton, never to carry; and he drove the broncho into furious pursuit of the big horse that was bearing Lucy and Sanders away.

The light, clean-limbed broncho, unimpeded by a cumbersome double weight, began to gain in the mad race. Justin ploughed its sides mercilessly with the spurs, struck it with his hands, and yelled at it, to increase its speed.

"Go, go!" he cried; "we must catch that scoundrel quick!"

His line of action when that was accomplished was not formulated, further than that he knew he would hurl himself on Sanders, tear him from the saddle, and punish him as it seemed he deserved.

Steadily the separating distance was decreased.

Sanders still sent the big horse on, almost without a backward glance. He held Lucy tightly in his arms. Apparently she had fainted, for Justin could not observe that she struggled to release herself.

Again Justin bellowed a command to Sanders to halt. He was close upon the big horse now. Sanders turned in his saddle heavily, for the weight of the girl impeded his movements. Justin fancied he could see the man's little eyes glitter, as they did that day when he delivered his ultimatum to Davison.

" You go to hell! " he bellowed back.

The momentary slacking of his rein caused his horse to stumple, and it fell to the ground.

Justin galloped up in an insanity of blazing wrath. Lucy, hurled from the back of the horse with Sanders, sprang up with a cry, and ran toward Justin. Sanders, having picked himself up uninjured, stared at her. His flushed face whitened and his little eyes showed a singular and ominous gleam.

" Take her," he said, hoarsely; " damn you, take her—I was doin' the best I could! "

Lucy's face was white—piteously white; her dry hot eyes gushed with tears, and a sob choked in her throat.

" Justin—Justin, it was not—his fault—nothing he did; it was the snake; see, it bit me, here! " She thrust forward her hand. " Near the wrist, there; and—and it is swelling fast, fast! We—we must—get to Doctor Clayton's quick—quick!"

Justin staggered under the revulsion of feeling. He caught the shaking and terrified girl in his arms.

" Help me—get her into the saddle, Sanders," he

begged, stammering the words. "And—and I ask your pardon! Later I will tell you what I—but now I need you to—"

Sanders sprang to his assistance.

"Better take my horse; he's bigger!"

"The broncho is faster," said Justin. "That's right. Now—that's right!"

He climbed shakily into the saddle. He felt his very brain reeling. Then the broncho leaped forward. Sanders struck it a smart blow to hurry it on; and stood looking at them, as they galloped wildly on toward Clayton's, which had been his own destination.

"Damn him!" he cried hoarsely. His little eyes glittered and his lips foamed. "I was doin' the best I could, and I would have made it all right." He clenched his fists. "I would 'a' been his friend—and helped him; but now—"

The sentence, the threat, died, gurgling, in his throat.

As for Justin, he had no thought now but to reach Doctor Clayton's in the quickest time possible. He did not spare the broncho. Yet, even in these minutes of whirling excitement, when anxiety, fright, love, chagrin, and regret, fought within him for the mastery, he did not forget some of the things learned of Clayton. He took out his handkerchief, rolled it into a cord with hands and teeth, and with hands and teeth knotted it round the bitten arm just above the two small punctures made by the teeth of the rattlesnake.

The arm was already swollen, and he thought it

was becoming discolored. At times burning tears gushed from his eyes in a way to blind him and keep him from seeing anything clearly. Lucy lay in his arms as if dead. For aught he knew she might even then be dying. The poison of the rattlesnake had been injected near the great artery of the wrist, as she stooped in her embarrassment to pluck a flower, and it would be speedy in its malignant effects. With that terrible fear upon him, Justin blamed himself ceaselessly for the delay he had wrought in the mistaken notion that Sanders was acting with sinister intent. If that brief delay should aid to a fatal result he knew he should go mad or kill himself.

When Lucy stirred, or moaned, he bent over her with wild words of inquiry. Her eyes were closed, and she was very white.

"We are almost there—almost there!" he cried.

Yet how long the distance seemed!

Clayton came to the door, when he heard the clatter of hoofs. He wore a faded smoking jacket and had a black skull cap perched on the top of his head. His half lounging manner changed when he saw the trembling broncho, dripping sweat and panting with labored breath from the strain of its terrible run, and saw Justin climbing heavily out of the saddle with Lucy. When her feet touched the ground she stood erect, but tottered, clinging weakly to Justin's arm. She made a brave effort to walk, as Clayton hurried to her side. He saw the knotted handkerchief and the swollen arm, and knew what had happened.

"Into the house," he said, tenderly supporting

her. "Don't be frightened, Lucy—don't be frightened! Justin, help me on the other side—ah, that's right! A little girl was here only the other day, from the Purgatoire, who had been bitten hours before, and I had her all right in a little while. So, there's really nothing to be alarmed about."

Clayton's cheering words were a stimulant. Yet the battle was not fought out. Before victory was announced, word had gone to the ranch-house and to Jasper's. Philip Davison came, with Harkness and Pearl Newcome, and Mary Jasper rode in on her pony, wild-eyed and tremulous. Among others who arrived was William Sanders.

Justin found him in the yard, out by the grass-grown cellar, where he stood in a subdued manner, holding the reins of his raw-boned horse. His manner changed and his little eyes burned when he saw Justin.

"I don't keer to have you speak to me," he said, abruptly. "I reckon from this on our ways lays in different directions. I don't know what you thought I was up to, but I was doin' the best I could to git that girl to this place in a hurry. You chipped in. I s'pose you think it was all right, and that you helped matters?"

"I have already asked your pardon, and I ask it again. I see now that I was a fool. We'll forget the whole thing, if you're willing."

Justin held out his hand in an amicable manner.

Sanders disdained to take it.

"I'm not willin' to fergit it, myself. I wanted to think well of you, rememberin' when I first come to

this house, and some other things, but that's past. You made me look and feel cheaper than thirty cents Mexican, and I ain't expectin' to fergit it."

He turned away, and walked along the edge of the old cellar, leading his horse. That William Sanders had in him all the elements of a vicious hater was shown then, and many times afterward. He did not speak to Justin again that day; and when the announcement came that Clayton had won his hard fight and Lucy was on the high road to recovery, he mounted and rode away.

CHAPTER VIII

AND MARY WENT TO DENVER

MARY JASPER did not know that she went to Denver because she had read Pearl Newcome's romances; but so it was. She was in love with Ben, and expected to become his wife by and by, but her day-dreams were of conquests and coronets.

The alluringly beautiful race of Sibyl had reappeared in Paradise Valley. On her first visit, long before, Sibyl had marked the rare dark beauty of Mary Jasper. Mary was now a fair flower bursting into rich bloom, and wherever a fair flower grows some covetous hand is stretched forth to pluck it.

Though Sibyl had flung Curtis Clayton aside with as little compunction as if his pure heart were no more than the gold on the draggled wings of the butterfly crushed in the road, curiosity and vanity had drawn her again and again to the little railroad town at the base of the flat-topped mountain. There in the home of an acquaintance she had found means to gratify her curiosity concerning the life led by Clayton, and could feed her vanity with the thought that he had immured himself because of her.

Twice she had seen him, having taken rides through the valley for the purpose; once beholding him from afar, watching him as he strolled near the willows by the stream, unconscious of her surveillance, his bent left arm swinging as he walked. On the second occasion they had met face to face in the trail, while he was on his way to the town to inspect some books he had ordered conditionally. Sibyl was on a mettlesome bay, and he on his quick-stepping buckskin broncho. She towered above him from the back of the larger horse. He lifted his hat with a gentle gesture, flushing, and holding the reins tightly in his stiff left hand.

"You are looking well!" she cried gaily. It touched her to know that he still carried himself erect, that he was still a handsome, pleasant-eyed man, whom any woman might admire. "And really I've been thinking you were moping down here, and suffering from loneliness and hopeless love!"

"Love is no longer hopeless, when it is dead!" he declared, voicing an indifference he did not feel.

Her light laugh fell like the sting of a whip.

"Oh, dear me! Is it so serious as that? But of course I don't believe anything you say. Love is a bright little humming-bird of a boy, who never dies. Truly, it must be lonesome down here, in this poky place. I can't understand why you stay here. You might come to Denver!" She looked at him archly, half veiling her dark eyes with their lustrous lashes, while her horse pawed fretfully at the bank. "I mean it, Curtis. You could be as far from me in

Denver as you are down here, if you wished to be. You know that as well as I do."

"I don't think I could," he said, and though his voice showed pain it showed resolution. "I find this a very good place. I like the quiet."

"So that no one will ever trouble you while you're studying or writing! You'll be a great author or scientist some day, I don't doubt."

He did not answer.

"Well, good bye, Curtis. I'm not so bad as I seem, perhaps; you don't see any horns or cloven hoof about me, do you?" She waved her hand. "And I'm glad to know you're looking so well, and are so contented and happy!"

She gave her horse a cut with her riding whip and galloped away.

How many more times Sibyl Dudley (she had taken her maiden name) came to the little town by the mountain Curtis Clayton did not know, and never sought to discover; but one day he was almost startled, when Justin brought him news that Mary Jasper had accompanied Sibyl to Denver, and was to remain there with her.

Clayton at once mounted his horse and rode up the valley in the waning afternoon, to where Sloan Jasper's house squatted by the stream in the midst of a green plume of cottonwoods of his own planting. He found Jasper in a stormy temper. There had been heavy August rains and a cloud-burst. The sluggish stream had overleaped its banks, smearing the alfalfa fields with sticky yellow mud and a tangle of weedy drift, in addition to softening

the soil until it was a spongy muck. Hundreds of cattle had ploughed through the softened soil during the night, for the storm had torn out a section of fence and let them drift into the cultivated area of the valley. Standing with Jasper was Clem Arkwright.

"Glorious, sublime!" Arkwright was saying.

He had taken off his hat, and stood in reverent attitude before the lighted mountain, a young, red-faced, pudgy man, with thick mustache. Though Sloan Jasper was not gifted with keen discernment he felt the attitude to be that of the Pharisee proclaiming his own excellence rather than that of his Maker. Arkwright seemed to be saying to him, "Behold one who has been endowed with a capacity which you lack, the capacity to appreciate and enjoy this sublime picture!"

All the way up the valley trail Curtis Clayton had been delighting in the beauty of that evening scene. The misty clouds lingering after the storm had hung white draperies about the wide shoulders of the mountain. Into these the descending sun had hurled a sheaf of fire-tipped arrows, and straightway the white draperies had burned red in streaks and the whole top of the mountain had flamed. The colors were fading now.

"Glorious, sublime!" Arkwright repeated.

"The sunlight on that mountain don't interest me a little bit, Arkwright," said Jasper, with curt emphasis; "what I want to know is how I'm going to protect myself? You say there ain't any herd law. You're a justice-of-the-peace, and I reckon a

lawyer, or a half of a one. We can have a herd law passed, can't we? And what's to keep me from shootin' them steers when I catch 'em in here? Powder and lead air cheap, and that's what I'll do; and then I'll let Davison do the suin'. I ain't got nothin' much, and he'll find it hard work to git blood out of a turnip. Let him do the suin', and see if he can collect damages; you say I can't.'"

"You're hopeless, Jasper!

"'A primrose by the river's brim,
A yellow primrose was to him—
And it was nothing more!'"

Arkwright made the quotation and sighed, as Clayton rode up. "But see the fading light on those clouds! Was there ever anything like it? What does it make you think of?"

"It makes me think that if I had my way I could improve on nature a bit in this valley; I wouldn't send all the rain in a bunch and jump the river out of its banks and roll it over everything, but distribute it a little through some of the other months of the year."

Arkwright turned his pudgy form about.

"Ah, Doctor! Glad to see you. You ought to get over to the town oftener. You wouldn't care to ride up this evening, I suppose? The sunlight is going, and I must be going, too."

Clayton did not care to ride to town. When Arkwright was gone he questioned Jasper concerning the occasion of his visit.

"I reckon he come down for a word with Ben Davison; I don't know what else. He and Ben air gittin' thick as fleas lately. It's my opinion that Ben's gamblin' away his wages up there in the town with him, but I don't know; and I don't care. I'd be glad to have both of 'em keep away from me. Look at that millet, Doctor; just look at it! Ruined by Davison's cattle; and Arkwright tells me I can't do anything, because there ain't any herd law in this county. But I can shoot 'em; and I'll do it next time they git in here, see if I don't."

Clayton had heard Jasper rave in that way before, and nothing had ever come of it. Other settlers had raved in the same manner, and then realized their helplessness. Looking into Jasper's angry face, he tried now to speak of Mary.

"I hear that your daughter has gone to Denver, Mr. Jasper!"

Jasper drew himself up, forgetful for the moment of his millet. A look of pride and pain overspread his hairy face.

"Yes, she's gone there to stay awhile with Mrs. Dudley. I didn't want her to, but she would go; it makes it mighty lonesome here, but she'll be happier up there, I reckon. Mrs. Dudley took a likin' to Mary, and wants to give her a better chance fer an ejication and other things than she can have here. So I reckon it's all right, though I didn't see at first how I could git along without her."

All at once Clayton's heart seemed to shrivel and shrink. He fumbled with the yellow mane of the broncho and with the reins that swung against its

neck. When he spoke after a little, trying to go on, his voice was husky.

"That woman is—"

"Yes, I allow Mrs. Dudley is a fine woman!"

Clayton's resolution failed utterly.

"And she's smart," Jasper declared, "smart as a steel-trap; when she talked with me about takin' Mary, and what she could do fer her, I could see that. She's mighty good-lookin', too; though I don't think anybody can come up in looks to my Mary. I wisht you could have seen her with some of her new fixin's on, which Mrs. Dudley bought fer her. She was certainly handsome. And she's goin' to enjoy herself there, I don't doubt. I've already had a letter from her, tellin' me how happy she is. I reckon I ought to be willin' fer her to have things her mother never had, fer she's fit fer it, and not have to slave as her mother did, and as I've always done. Yes, I reckon I'm glad she's gone; though 'tis a bit lonesome here, fer I ain't got anybody with me at all now, you see."

Though Curtis Clayton had visited Sloan Jasper for the express purpose of uttering a warning against Sibyl, he permitted Jasper to talk on, and the warning words remained unsaid. Jasper was inexpressibly lonely, now that his daughter was gone; yet it was plain that he would not call her back, and equally plain that he knew she would not return if he called never so loudly. And he was trusting that the thing he could not help was the very best thing for the child he loved. Clayton felt that he could not

stir up in the heart of this man a useless, peace-destroying, and perhaps a groundless, distrust.

So he rode away as the night shadows were falling, and gathered a great contempt for himself as he returned slowly homeward. He had no right to judge Sibyl, and possibly, very probably, misjudge her, he thought; yet he had a fear, amounting almost to conviction, that she was not a woman to whom should be given the charge and training of such a girl as Mary Jasper. That fear had sent him to Jasper; his retreat seemed a cowardly flight.

As for Mary, she was childishly happy in Denver. The only present cloud on the sky of her life was that her father had not really wished her to go. He had objected stoutly at first, but ever since her mother's departure from the earthly Paradise, which had been full of all manner of hard labor, to that upper and better one where, her simple faith had assured her, she should toil no more, Mary had contrived to do pretty much as she pleased. Her head was filled with romantic ideas, garnered from Pearl Newcome's much-read novels. In this matter, as in all others, she had taken her own way, like a high-headed young horse clamping the bit tightly between its teeth and choosing its road in defiance of the guiding rein. And her father had submitted, when he could do nothing else, had admired and praised her in the wonderful new clothing provided for her by Mrs. Dudley, and had driven her to the station with her litttle trunk packed with pretty trifles. He had kissed her good bye there, bravely enough, with hardly a quiver in his voice, and so

she had gone away. She recalled him often now, standing, a pathetic figure, in his cheap clothing, waving his hand to her as she looked from the car window to throw a kiss as a final farewell.

But this picture seldom troubled her long. Denver was too attractive to the girl who had scarcely in her whole life seen a place larger than the little town at the base of the familiar flat-topped mountain. And what a gay, care-free life Denver led, as viewed by her through the eyes of Mrs. Dudley! This was Vanity Fair, though Mary had never even heard that name. Mrs. Dudley kept a carriage, which rolled with shining wheels through the Denver streets to the merry tattoo of trotting hoofs and the glint of silver-mounted harness. A driver sat on the box in blue livery, and the easy sway and jounce of the springs made her feel as if she were being lifted forward on velvet cushions.

Young men and old men turned about to admire her and the woman who sat by her side, as the carriage rolled along. Women looked at them, too, sometimes with shining eyes of envy; looked at the carriage, at the beautiful clothing, and the two bright faces. Mary wore jewels now, and Sibyl had roped her slender neck with a heavy gold thread which bore a neat little locket at its end. Into that locket Mary had put the gnarled wisp of hair which in a moment of devotion at home she had clipped from her father's head. To wear it now was something of a penance for leaving him in his loneliness.

Sibyl had a " set," which was very gay and overflowed with parties where cards were played for

favors, and in little dances which were said to be very "select." Gay debonair men and handsomely dressed women attended these dances and parties and made life one never-ending round of merriment. Mary thought she had never known what it was to really live until now. Sibyl delighted in her; the girl's fresh flower-like face and inevitable gaucherie set off and added to Sibyl's own attractiveness.

Mary wrote to her father with religious regularity every Sunday. Sunday was a religious day, and the writing of a letter to her father was performed almost as a sacred duty, so that Sunday seemed the appropriate day for it. She wrote also to Ben Davison, more fully than to her father, describing to him the joys of her new mode of life, and appealing to him not to be "savage" about her comments concerning some of the young men she met.

"Dear Ben," she said in one of her letters, "Sibyl Dudley is a perfect darling. I am surprised that you didn't know she had been married. I thought you knew all the time. She is divorced now, I think, though she never says anything to me about it. I'm sure there must be a beautiful romance in her life, as lovely as any of those Pearl reads, for sometimes when she thinks I'm busy she sits for a long time perfectly silent, as if thinking of something serious. But in spite of that she is as gay and happy as can be. Yes, she is a darling; and so are you, you old grumpy, grizzly bear! I wish you could send me a pony—not a broncho! It would be such fun to go galloping on my own pony through the streets. I

ride a good deal, but these Denver horses are such big things. Mrs. Dudley is a superb horsewoman. Is that right, horsewoman?—it sounds funny, worse than cowboy. Sometimes when we meet people she introduces me as her niece, and the people smile and say how much we look alike. Isn't that funny, too?"

Sibyl abounded in "charities," and had numbers of feeble men and old women who devoutly, or otherwise, blest her shadow as she passed. Under her tutelage Mary also found it pleasant to play Lady Bountiful. It gave her quite as much comfort as the penning of that Sunday letter to her father. Her father had lived a saving and scrimping life and had never given anything to anybody, so that to Mary this was an entirely new and pleasing phase of life's conduct. It made her feel so superior to bestow with unstinting hand, and be blest for the largess, as if the donor were a veritable gift-showering angel, or luxury-distributing fairy, with red gold on her wings.

All in all, Mary found Denver to be a place of unheard-of delights, in which, especially to those who were not poor and in want, life passed like one of the plays which she sometimes witnessed from a box in the opera house, or after the fashion of the rollicking fanfare of the romances in Pearl Newcome's wonderful trunk. And it was good, all of it; much better than Paradise Valley, or even the society of Ben Davison, though she was sure that she still loved Ben.

CHAPTER IX

A REVELATION OF CHARACTER

WILLIAM SANDERS did not forget nor forgive.

He ceased to annoy Lucy Davison, and even in time affected to overlook the humiliation to which he felt Justin had subjected him; but deep in his heart he nursed both for Philip Davison and Justin an ineradicable hate, which revealed itself at times in disputes fomented with the farmers.

Sanders' half-veiled enmity troubled Justin less than the discovery which came to him one day of the innate dishonesty of Ben Davison's character.

Philip Davison was in one of the bunk rooms, paying off his "hands," when Justin and Ben arrived from the high mesa where for a month they had been line-riding together. Bronchos stood outside on the trampled grass. Within, where the walls above the rude wooden bunks were hung with bridles and quirts, saddles and ponchos, ropes and spurs, sat Davison, at a small unpainted table, counting out money to his employes and keeping a record of the amounts paid by writing names and sums with a stub pencil in a soiled account book. Davison was fifty years of age now, red-faced, blue-eyed, and bearded. Justin had learned to admire and like

him, for there were admirable traits in his character. Though he swore horrible oaths at times, which he complained a man had to do if he handled cattle and cowboys, he had generally been kind to Justin, and he had conceived a fondness for Clayton, whom he respected for his learning and skill as a physician.

Having received his wages from the hands of Philip Davison, Justin went out behind the bunk house, and was counting his bills in the drizzle that was falling, when Ben appeared, his manner nervous and his eyes shining.

"I'm ahead this time!" he said.

Then, to Justin's astonishment, he lifted one of his boots, and there, sticking to the muddy sole, was a five-dollar bill. He pulled it away with a chuckle, wiped off the mud as well as he could, and added it to the pile in his hands.

Justin stared at him, with a look which Ben resented.

"Some money was on the table and the wind flirted that bill to the floor. I set my boot on it, and when I walked out it walked out with me."

"You didn't do that!"

"What's the difference? Father will never know! And he's got plenty more where that came from. He only pays me beastly cowboy's wages, when I'm his own son. So I helped myself, when I saw my chance."

Justin's look showed reproof, and Ben flushed in angry irritation.

"You'd tell, would you?"

"That's stealing!"

A flush of red waved into Ben's face. Stung by the inner knowledge of his wrong, this blunt condemnation roused the latent devil in him. He leaped at Justin blindly, and struck him in the face.

Justin had never fought any one in his life, nor could he remember that he had ever before been struck in anger. But when that blow fell on his face with stinging force, his head became unaccountably hot, he trembled violently, and with a hoarse cry gurgling from his lips he sprang upon Ben and struck him to the earth with one blow of his fist.

Having done that, he drew back, shaken and dismayed. He had knocked Ben Davison down, when but a moment before they had been friends! He stared at Ben, who had dropped heavily to the ground. Already he was remorseful and almost frightened. Ben scrambled up, cursing.

"I'll make you pay for that!" he said, wiping a speck of blood from his trembling lips with his hand.

"It—it was your fault! I—"

Philip Davison came round the corner of the building upon this scene, having heard the blows and the fall. He saw Ben's cut and quivering lip, his clothing wet and muddy, and Justin standing before him with hot, flushed face.

"You struck Ben?" he cried.

Ben was his pride.

Justin looked at him, after an appealing glance at Ben.

"Yes," he acknowledged, with humility and a

feeling of repentant uneasiness. He had gained Ben's enmity, and he feared he had lost Philip Davison's regard, which he valued highly.

Ben was crumpling together the wad of bills, and thrust them into his pocket.

"Yes, he struck me, but I hit him first," he confessed. "We had a little quarrel, a few words, that's all."

Though no larger than Justin, he was older, and it humiliated him to confess even this much.

Davison was annoyed and angry.

"Go into the house, Ben," he commanded; "I'll see you later."

When Ben was gone he turned to Justin.

"I've tried to do right by you, Justin, and I've liked your work; but you must remember that Ben is my son. I can't think that you had any good reason to strike him."

"I didn't intend to strike him," Justin urged, "and I shouldn't have done so if he hadn't struck me first."

"Well, I won't have you two quarreling and fighting. Just remember that, will you?"

"He struck me first!" said Justin, sturdily, though deeply troubled by the knowledge that he had offended Philip Davison.

Davison followed Ben into the house, leaving Justin weak and bewildered. He had smothered his sudden explosive rage, yet he still felt its influence. That he could have struck Ben in that way seemed incredible; yet he tried to justify the deed

to himself. He was about to walk away, when Ben reappeared and came up to him.

"Justin, you're a brick, to stand by a fellow that way! You knocked me down, but I don't hold it against you, for you can keep your mouth shut."

"You still have that money?"

"Of course."

"I haven't changed my opinion about that!"

Ben's face reddened again.

"What if I did keep it? You re fussy, and you're a fool! What is my father's is mine, or it will be mine some day; I just took a little of it ahead of time, that's all. It will all be mine, when he goes over the divide."

Justin was horrified. Ben had expressed reckless and defiant views on many subjects, but nothing like this flippant speculation concerning his father's death.

"I won't listen to you when you talk that way," he declared; and he moved away.

CHAPTER X

PIPINGS OF PAN

THE result of this quarrel was that Justin was banished temporarily from the ranch, though it was not assigned as the reason for his exile. Fogg had been forced to take a flock of sheep in payment for a debt owed him by a sheepman. The sheep were already in Paradise Valley, and were to be sent at once into the mountains. Davison ordered Justin to take charge of these sheep, and hurried shepherd and flock into the hills, while Lucy was temporarily away from home. Justin could not rebel against this order except mentally, if he wished to remain in Davison's employment and retain, or regain, his good-will.

Before setting forth he left a letter for Lucy with Pearl Newcome, and was sure she would get it. Yet he departed from the ranch with a heavy heart; and as he went on his way he questioned why he and not another had been selected for this life of lonely exile in the mountains. He was almost sure it was because of his trouble with Ben.

Justin was assisted in driving the sheep to the high altitudes, where they were to graze until cold weather would make it advisable to bring them into

the lower foot-hills. A sufficient supply of food for a month or more was taken along, and he was helped in the work of erecting a brush-and-pole house.

He was well up among the pines and aspens, where the nights are always cool, with often a sharp frost even in mid-summer. Snow banks were in sight, and here and there streams and small lakes of the purest ice water. Occasionally a lordly elk crashed through a grove, or came out with such suddenness on the lonely herder and his woolly charges that it whistled and fled in astonishment. Black-tailed deer passed frequently on the slopes, and now and then Justin came upon the track of a bear. The only animals he could not love were the worthless coyotes, that made life a burden to him and murdered sleep in their efforts to slay the sheep.

Of all, the sheep were the most vexatious and stupid, having no originality of impulse, and being maddeningly, monotonously alike. When hungry, in the earlier part of the day, they exhausted his strength and that of his dog, as he followed them, while they swarmed everywhere, nibbling, nibbling, with a continual, nerve-racking "baa-a-a! baa-a-a!" Justin could not wonder that sheep-herders often go mad. The sheep were more than two thousand in number; and to keep anything like a count of them, so that he might be sure that the flock was not being devastated by the sly coyotes, was trying work.

But there were other times when he was given

hours of lazy ease, when he could lie with the faithful dog on the cool grass and look up into the cool sky; could listen to the foaming plunge of the mountain stream, to the fluttered whisperings of the aspens and the moanings of the pines, and could watch the flirting flight of the magpies, or the gambolings of playful deer.

So Justin had much opportunity for thought; and his thoughts and imaginings ran wide and far, with Lucy Davison and Doctor Clayton not very far from both center and periphery wherever they ran or flew. That he had been forced to come away without a parting word with Lucy troubled him sorely.

He had his mother's little Bible with him, containing the wisp of brown hair, and the written fly-leaf:

"Justin, my baby-boy, is now six months old. May God bless and preserve him and may he become a good man."

He read in it much, in his leisure; and studied that writing many, many times, thinking of his mother, and wondering about his father. And he questioned as to what his life probably would have been if his mother had lived, or if he had known of his father. Yet he was very well satisfied to have it as it had been ordered. It had brought to him Lucy Davison; and he might have missed her, if fate had not led him to Paradise Valley and kept him there.

He was quite sure that no father could have done more for him than Clayton, nor loved him with a more unselfish love. To the missionary preacher,

Peter Wingate, and to Curtis Clayton, he acknowledged that he owed all he was or could ever be. He thought very lovingly of Clayton, as he lay on the cool slopes looking into the cool sky.

And, indeed, the lonely doctor had been wondrously kind to the boy whose life and future had been so strangely committed to his keeping. Without intending anything in particular beyond the impartation of knowledge, he had rounded, on the foundation laid by Peter Wingate, a structure of character that combined singular sweetness with great nobility and strength, for Justin had inherited from his mother certain qualities of sturdy resolution which Clayton himself lacked. The one great blemish, or fault, was a quick and inflammable temper, that almost resisted control.

Utterly unaware of the fact himself, as he lay thus among his sheep, while his thoughts ranged far and wide, Justin was like that ruddy David, youthful son of Jesse, with whose life story, told in his mother's little Bible, he was so familiar, or like Saul in his boyhood days. His lusty youth, his length of limb, his shapely head covered with its heavy masses of hair, his tanned strong face with its kindly, clear-cut profile, and his steady unwinking eyes that looked into the blue skies with color as blue, all spoke of unrecognized power.

He dreamed of the future, as well as of the past, building cloud castles as unsubstantial as the changing clouds that floated above him. He knew that many of them were but dreams. Others it seemed to him might be made to come true, with Lucy Davi-

son to help him. He did not intend to remain either cowboy or sheep-herder, he was sure of that; and he did not think he would care to become a doctor, like Clayton. He would like to accomplish great things; yet if he could not, he would like to accomplish the small things possible to him in a manner that should be great. Not for his own sake—he felt sure it was not for his own sake—but for Lucy and Clayton! He wanted to be worthy of them both.

It must be confessed that his wandering thoughts were chiefly occupied with Lucy Davison. He delighted to recall those happy moments under the cottonwoods. Always in his dreams she was true to him, as he was to her; and she was longing for his letters, as he was for hers.

Naturally, other things and people were often in Justin's thoughts. He thought of Philip Davison, of Ben, with whom he had quarreled, and of Mary Jasper and her father. With a keen sense of sympathy he pictured Sloan Jasper plodding his slow rounds, trying to satisfy with his horses and his cows that desire for loving companionship which only the presence of his daughter could satisfy. He marveled that Mary could leave her father to that life of loneliness for even the gayeties of Denver. And thinking thus, he pitied Mary.

Often Justin lay under the night sky, rolled in his blankets, when the coyotes were most annoying, ready to leap up at the first alarm given by the dog. He carried a revolver for use in defending the sheep against the coyotes. This was a case in which, as he knew, even Curtis Clayton would approve of

slaying. He began to see clearly, too, in this warfare with the coyotes, that nature, instead of being uniformly kind, as Clayton liked to think, is often pitilessly cruel, and seems to be in a state of armed combat in which there is never the flutter of the white flag of truce.

It was the visualizing to him of that age-old conflict in which only the fittest survive. As he looked out upon this warring world, all the animals, with few exceptions, seemed to be trying to devour all the others. The coyotes slew the sheep, the mountain lions pulled down the deer, the wild cats devoured the birds, and for all the fluttering, flying insect life the birds made of the glorious turquoise skies an endless hell of fear.

Often there came to Justin under the night sky rare glimpses of the wild life of the mountains. Playful antelopes gamboled by, all unconscious of his presence, frisking and leaping in the light of early morning, or scampering in wild rushes of fright when they discovered his presence or the dog gave tongue; bucks clattered at each other with antlered horns, or called across the empty spaces; wild cat and cougar leaped the rocks with padded footfalls and occasionally pierced the still air with screams as startling in their suddenness as the staccato, Indian-like clamor of the coyotes. Always wild cat, cougar and coyote brought Justin from beneath his blankets with every sense alert, and sent the dog scurrying into the gloom in the direction of the sound.

Clayton's habits of study and writing had not

been lost on Justin, and now and then he tried to set down in his little note book some description of the things that moved him. He composed letters, too, to Lucy, many letters which he never meant to send. In them he told her of his life with the sheep, and of how much he loved her. Often these letters were composed, but not written at all.

In one of those letters to Lucy which were not intended to be sent he incorporated some of his thoughts concerning the farmers of the valley, together with a bit of verse. The old hope of Peter Wingate had come back to him for the moment, and he saw the valley as Wingate saw it in his dream of the future:

"The crooking plumes of the rice-corn,
The sorghum's emerald spear,
The rustle of blue alfalfa,
Out on this wild frontier,
Whisper of coming thousands,
Whose hurrying, eager tread
Shall change this mould into kerneled gold
And give to the millions bread.

"'Tis now but a dream prophetic;
The plover tilts by the stream,
The coyote calls from the hilltop,
And the ——"

Justin got no further. The impossibility of the fulfillment of that dream had come to him as he sought to picture the present.

When the driver of the "grub wagon" came with supplies and the news of the ranch, he brought a letter from Lucy; and he took away a letter for her, when he departed. The news from home was cheering. Outwardly at least matters had not

changed there. No one had come, and no one had gone, and the usual work was going on.

More than once the driver came, and each time Justin saw him depart with unspoken longing. He would have given much to be privileged to go back with him. Yet Justin was not and had not been lonely in the ordinary meaning of that word; he was lonely for the companionship of Lucy Davison, for the glance of her brown eyes, for the music of her words; but, possessing that inner light of the mind in which Clayton believed, it brightened his isolation as with a sacred fire, filled the wooded slopes and craggy heights with life and beauty, and suggested deep thoughts and deeper imaginings.

Filled with dreams and work, with desire and accomplishment, the slow months rolled by. With the descent of the snow-line on the high peaks the sheep were driven into the foot-hills, and then on down into the plain itself, where not only grass, but the various sages—black, white, salt and bud sage—together with shad-scale and browse, furnished an abundance of the food they liked.

Then they were taken away, their summer herding having been a good investment for Fogg; and Justin returned to Paradise Valley, clear-eyed, sturdy, and handsomer even than before. He had learned well the to him necessary lesson of patience, and had tasted the joy of duty well done. More than all, he had begun to find himself, and to know that childhood and youth had fallen from him, and that he was a man.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAGEDY OF THE RANGE

JUSTIN was startled by the changes which had come to Paradise Valley in the closing weeks of his long isolation in the mountains. Steve Harkness and Pearl Newcome were married, and Lucy Davison had been sent East to school. The latter filled him almost with a feeling of dismay. Among the other changes to be noted was that William Sanders had written letters to a number of farmers, some of whom were now in the valley and had taken government land or purchased mortgaged quarter-sections.

Justin discovered, in talks with them, that these men had been neighbors of Sanders on the irrigated lands at Sumner. They had sold out there, as Sanders had done, and having heard from him of the possibilities of Paradise Valley, they had moved to it, with their families and belongings. Others, it was reported, were coming. Some of them brought a few cows, as well as horses; and before the winter storms came they erected cheap dug-outs for themselves, and prepared flimsy shelters and cut wild hay for their stock. It was their intention to try irrigation.

Justin soothed his disappointment at not seeing

Lucy Davison by writing many letters to her, to which she replied sparingly. He was away from home much of the time, riding lonely lines with other cowboys. Whenever he came home and found no letter from Lucy he felt discouraged; when one was there, he returned to his work cheered and comforted. As for Ben, Justin saw little of him. Davison kept them well apart, by giving them separate assignments.

In the severest of the winter storms, when the grass of the range had been covered with snow for many days, the cattle breached the fences, and mingling with cattle from other ranches they began to roam over the mesas and valley, a terror to the settlers, and as destructive as the locusts of Egypt. The cowboys could do nothing with them; could not hold them on the open lines, and could not repair the broken fences in the bitter cold and the blinding snow. It was a repetition in miniature of the days when the whole of the Great Plains was an open range, and cattle, shelterless and without food, wandered in the winter storms in pitiable distress, dying by thousands.

As it was useless and perilous to try to ride any line, Justin and the other cowboys came home. Justin's feet and hands were frosted, and he went to Clayton's, where he remained, to have the benefit of Clayton's medical skill as well as his companionship.

Clayton was so troubled by the sufferings of the cattle that he could talk of little else. From his frost-covered windows weary bands of the starving

animals could be seen ploughing through the drifts. In each band the largest and strongest were usually in the lead, breaking a way through the snow; the others followed, moving slowly and weakly, in single file, across the white wastes, their legs raw and bleeding from contact with the cutting snow-crust. Their hair was so filled with fine snow beaten in and compacted that often they resembled snow banks, and they were wild-eyed, and gaunt to emaciation.

Now and then a band would turn on its course and move back along the path it had broken, eating the frozen grass which the trampling had uncovered. Nothing in the way of food came amiss. The dry pods and stalks of the milk-weed and the heads of thistles protruding through the snow were hungrily snatched at. Unfenced stacks of wild hay prepared by the farmers and settlers for their own stock, disappeared like snow drifts in the spring sun, unless the owners were vigilant and courageous enough to beat back the desperate foragers. Many wild combats took place between the cattle and the exasperated farmers, and more than one man escaped narrowly the impaling horns of some infuriated steer. It seemed cruel to drive the cattle from the food they so much needed, but the farmers were forced to it.

Even Clayton and Justin found it necessary to issue forth, armed with prodding pitchforks, and fight with the famishing cattle for the stack of hay which Clayton had in store for his horse. He had fenced it in, but the cattle breached the fence and

he could not repair it perfectly while the storm lasted.

"The cattle business as it is carried on in this country is certainly one of the most cruel forms of cruelty to animals," Clayton declared, as he came in exhausted by one of these fights for the preservation of his little haystack. "The cattlemen provide no feed or shelter; in fact, with their immense herds that would be an impossible thing; and you see the result. Their method works well enough when the winters are mild, but more than half of them are not mild. Yet," he continued sarcastically, "the cattlemen will tell you that it pays! If they do not lose over twenty per cent. in any one year the business can stand it. Think of it! A deliberate, cold-blooded calculation which admits that twenty out of every hundred head of cattle may be sacrificed in this method of raising cattle on the open range! And the owners of the cattle will stand up and talk to you mildly about such heartless cruelty, and dare to call themselves men! Even Fogg will do it. As for Davison, I suppose he was born and bred to the business and doesn't know any better. But it's a burning shame."

Justin was stirred as deeply. Clayton's viewpoint had become his own. It lashed his conscience to feel that he was in some slight measure responsible for the condition he was witnessing. He was connected with the Davison ranch, if only as an employe. As for holding the cattle behind the fences and the open lines, that had not been possible; yet, if it could have been done, their condition would

have been worse. By breaking away they were given more land to roam over, and that meant more milk-weed pods and thistle heads, and more slopes where a bit of frosted grass was bared by the knife-like winds, to say nothing of the stacks of hay now and then encountered.

Yes, it was a burning shame. Justin felt it; and he grew sick at heart as day by day he watched that tragedy of the unsheltered range, where hundreds of hapless cattle were yielding up their lives.

CHAPTER XII

WITH SIBYL AND MARY

ON her way home for a brief visit at the close of the summer, which she had spent in the East, Lucy Davison stopped in Denver, to visit Mary Jasper, from whom she had received glowing letters. Mary had not written for several weeks, and Lucy was surprised to find her ill; an illness resulting from the unaccustomed excitement of the Denver life she led under the guidance of Sibyl Dudley and the too sudden transition from the quiet of Paradise Valley. She was not seriously ill, however, and looked very attractive, as she lay propped about with cushions and pillows, her dark hair framing her face and her dark eyes alight with eagerness when Lucy appeared. Lucy was almost envious, as she contemplated Mary's undeniable beauty.

Sibyl lavished attention and care on her charge, and she greeted Lucy with every evidence of delight and affection.

"My dear, you are tired!" she said. "Let me have some cakes and tea brought up for you at once. A little wine, or some champagne, would be good for you. You wouldn't care for it? Then we'll have the tea and cakes. And Mary may sit up in

bed a few minutes, just in honor of this visit. It was so good of you to stop off in Denver to see her."

Sibyl was very beautiful herself, quite as beautiful as Mary, though very much older. Lucy thought she had not aged a day in appearance since she had first met her, in the home of that acquaintance in the little town at the entrance to Paradise Valley. Sibyl was past-master of that wonderful preservative art which defies wrinkles and gray hairs and the noiseless flight of that foe of all beautiful women, Time. She defied Time, as she defied everything, except the small conventionalities of life, and the changing fashions. She made friends with these, and they served her well.

While talking with Lucy, and nibbling at the cake or sipping the tea, she stopped now and then to caress with coaxing tones her canary, which she had brought into the room and hung in its gilded cage at the window to brighten the place for Mary. She possessed naturally, or had cultivated, that soft, low voice which a Great Poet has declared to be an excellent thing in a woman, and she had assiduously cultivated an outward appearance of much kindness; so that altogether she was very charming, even in the eyes of Lucy Davison, and a most agreeable hostess. Mary was delighted with her.

"Do you know," said Mary, in a burst of confidence, which a favorable opportunity brought, "she is *so* good! And she is as kind to the poor as she can be. I know of two old women, and one old man, whom she nearly supports. Of course it isn't

really any sacrifice for her to do it, for she is wealthy. It's the funniest thing, the way she speaks about it. She says she gives things to poor people just because the giving makes her feel good. 'Give a quarter to a beggar,' she says, 'and you will feel warm inside all day. It is a cheap way to purchase comfort.'"

In that same conversation Mary chanced to mention Curtis Clayton.

"I spoke of him to Mrs. Dudley one day, and I asked her if she knew him."

"'Oh, yes, I know him,' she said; 'he is a fool, a poor fool!'

"'He looks so comical,' I said to her, 'swinging that stiff arm!'

"Then she looked at me—oh, I can't tell you how funny her eyes were then, just as if coals were shining behind them, and she said, awfully quiet:

"'I happen to know how he got that—it was by doing a brave and unselfish deed! He was in love with a beautiful but silly girl, whom I knew.'

"Then she told me the story. He was with this girl on his vacation. He was in Yale then, and she was the daughter of a worthless hotel-keeper. He first met her at the hotel while he was spending a summer in the mountains. She knew that he loved her, and she was vain of it, and she wanted to make him show it. There was a flower growing in a cleft of a cañon, and she asked him to get it for her. He descended. It was dangerous; and she, looking over and pointing out the flower, lost her footing and fell. She was caught by some bushes, but she had a good

fall, and landed at a point where she could not get up. The fright that he got by seeing her fall caused him to lose his footing, and he slipped and broke his left arm. To get her up he had to reach down with one hand and hold to an aspen with the other. He could only hold with his right hand, for his left arm was broken; so he dangled his broken left arm over for her to clutch; and she, frightened and selfish, gripped the hand, and after a great effort scrambled up. He held on until she was safe, and then (he had already turned white as death) he fainted. He revived after a time, and they got out of there, forgetting the flower; and though the doctors did what they could, he has had a stiff arm ever since."

Mary shivered a little, sympathetically.

"I can't ever think of Doctor Clayton now without seeing him with that girl, dragging her out of that place with his broken arm. I asked Mrs. Dudley if the girl married him after all that; and she said yes, but it would have been better for him if she hadn't, if she had gone to her death in the cañon that day, for she wasn't a girl who could ever make any man happy. And do you know, I think it must have been that girl who caused him to live the life he is living!"

A sudden confusion had attacked Lucy Davison, who recalled certain conversations with Justin. They were in the nature of sacred confidences, so could not be mentioned even to Mary Jasper; but she, at least, knew that Sibyl was herself the girl whom Clayton had drawn from the cañon with that dangling broken arm, and whom he had afterward mar-

ried. Why had he deserted her, or she him? And why were they now living apart? Believing that the name of Sibyl's husband had been Dudley, Mary had failed to guess the truth.

Mary told Lucy that it would not be surprising if Mrs. Dudley married again, as there was "just the dearest man" who called on her with much frequency and seemed to be greatly enamored of her.

"He has a funny little bald head," said Mary, "and he wears glasses, the kind you pinch on your nose; he keeps them dangling against his coat by a black cord. And he is as kind as kind can be, and a perfect gentleman. Mrs. Dudley says he is very rich, and I really believe she will marry him some time, for she seems to like him."

The name of this amiable gentleman, Lucy learned, was Mr. Plimpton, and he was a Denver stock broker. Neither Mary nor Lucy dreamed of the truth of his relations with Sibyl Dudley.

Having recurred to people and affairs in Paradise Valley, Mary chattered on like a gay little blackbird, and knew she was very bewitching, bolstered among the pillows. Her illness had taken some of the color out of her cheeks, yet they still showed a rosy tint when contrasted with the pillows, and the whiteness of the pillows emphasized the color of her eyes and hair. She asked Lucy to move the little dresser farther along the wall, that she might see herself in the mirror. She desired to get certain stubborn tangles out of her hair, she averred; but she really wanted to contemplate her own loveliness.

"Mrs. Dudley puts the dresser that way for me

sometimes, even when I don't ask her to; and often I lay for hours, looking into the mirror, when she has gone out of the room. It's like looking into the clouds, you know. You remember how we used to lie on the rocks there by the edge of the Black Cañon and look up at the clouds? We could see all kinds of things in them—men and horses, and wild animals, and just everything. When I let myself dream into the mirror that way I can see the same things there. And sometimes I try to picture what my future will be. Once I thought I saw a man's face looking out at me, and it wasn't Ben's! Mrs. Dudley said I had been dreaming, and didn't see anything, but it seemed real. I suppose I shall marry Ben, of course, just as you will marry Justin."

Lucy's face flushed.

"I don't see why that should be a matter of course!"

"So you've seen some one in the East who is better looking? You can't fool me! I know! What's his name?"

"Truly I haven't seen any one in the East who is better looking. I wasn't thinking of anything of the kind."

"Then he is still the best looking, is he? If you still think so, it's a sure sign that you'll marry him. That's why I think I shall marry Ben. I haven't seen any one in Denver I like as well as Ben, or who is as good looking; and one has a chance to see a good many men in a city like this."

"Has Ben been to call on you?"

"Oh, yes; he was here only last week. When I first came up here I couldn't get him to call, though I was told I might invite him. But when he got started he kept coming and coming, and now he comes almost too often. Mrs. Dudley has been very kind and good to him, and sometimes I'm almost jealous, thinking he likes her almost as much as he does me. I should be truly jealous, I think, if I didn't know about Mr. Plimpton."

She studied her mirrored reflection, wondering if it could be possible for Ben to find Mrs. Dudley, who was so much older and had already been married, more charming than herself. It was so unpleasant a thought that she frowned; and then, remembering that frowns will spoil even the smoothest forehead, she drove the frown away, and began to talk again.

Though Lucy Davison would not admit it, she was anxious to hasten on to Paradise Valley; so she remained but a day with Mary Jasper. Yet in that time Sibyl contrived to exhibit to her the carriage, the magnificent horses and the liveried driver, taking her as she did so on a long drive through some of the fashionable streets and avenues.

As the carriage swung them homeward Sibyl made a purchase of fruits and flowers, with which she descended into a shabby dwelling. When she came out she was followed to the door by a slatternly woman, who curtsied and thanked her volubly with a foreign accent.

"She's an Italian—just a dago, as some people say—but her husband has been sick for a month or

more, and I try to brighten her home up a bit. I don't know what he does when he's well; works for the railroad, I believe."

Then the carriage moved on again, away from the cheap tenements, and into the wealthier sections once more, where Sibyl lived.

"You mustn't tell father that I'm sick," was Mary's parting injunction to Lucy. "If he knew he might want me to come home. I will be entirely well by another week. I write to him every Sunday, just as if I was in the best of health; and so long as I don't tell him he thinks I'm as well as ever. And truly I am as well as ever, or will be in a few days. If you tell him anything, tell him I'll be down to see him this fall. I thought I should go last winter, but those awful storms came on, and I was so busy besides, that I just didn't. But I do think of him often, and you may tell him that, too, if you tell him anything."

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN AMBITION CAME

LUCY DAVISON was seldom absent from Justin's mind; and he was thinking of her, as he drove to town to make some purchases for Pearl, who, though married, was still the housekeeper at the ranch. The knowledge that Lucy was to arrive at home in a short time filled him with longing and delight.

As he drove along he could but note the appearance of the valley, and the houses of the new settlers and the old. Sanders had purchased more land, and had moved his dug-out close up to the trail and much nearer to the river. He had been indefatigable in his efforts to induce settlers to come into the valley, and successful to a degree that surprised Justin and the Davisons. Of the newer arrivals several were men of force and intelligence. They had given the valley their approval, and had set to work.

Sanders, it now appeared, had sold his land at Sumner for a considerable sum of money. At Sumner irrigation was being practiced successfully. He was firm in his belief that Paradise Valley could be irrigated as easily, and would make an agricultural section as rich. Therefore, he and the new farmers, joined by certain of the older ones, among them

Sloan Jasper, had built a dam across the stream near Jasper's and turned the water thus secured into some small canals, from which laterals conveyed it to the places where it was required.

They were working under unfavorable conditions, however; their dam was cheaply and hastily constructed, and the canals and ditches being new sucked up the water almost as fast as it could be turned into them.

Naturally Davison and Fogg were not pleased. The water which the farmers were using decreased the supply in the water-holes, and threatened suffering for the cattle if a dry season came on. They did not accept the theory promulgated by the farmers, that the water would find its way back through the soil into the stream. That the new enterprise troubled the ranchmen gave secret joy to William Sanders, whose bitter and vindictive mind was filled with ineradicable hatred of Davison and all connected with him. To strike a blow at Davison delighted him immeasurably.

Justin had a dusty drive that afternoon, for the land was dry. For several days a strong south wind had been blowing, and the mountain was draping its wide shoulders in misty vapor. These were good portents of rain; and when rain came at that season, after a period of drought, it came usually in a heavy storm.

Ben Davison had set out for the town ahead of Justin, on his pony. Ben had practically ceased to work on the ranch, except at intervals. He was much in the company of Clem Arkwright, and en-

joyed certain pleasures of the town, to which Arkwright had introduced him. For one thing, Arkwright played a game of poker that few men could beat. Arkwright was a small politician, and by virtue of that fact held the office of justice-of-the-peace. Arkwright had thrown his political following to Ben's support, in a recent county convention; and that, with the influence of Davison and Fogg, had given to Ben Davison the nomination to the state legislature.

As the bronchos climbed to the summit of a low divide, giving a long view of the trail, Justin saw Ben, far ahead, nearing the town. It gave him thought. Ben was not only ahead of him on the trail that day, but in other ways.

That summer of patient toil and sturdy thought spent high in the mountains with the sheep had brought to Justin the knowledge that he was now a man. As a man he was beginning to feel that he must do something, must set about the work of making a place and a name for himself in the world. Influenced by the idealist, Clayton, and by his love for Lucy, he had heretofore fed on love and dreams. He still loved, and he still dreamed, but he knew now that to these must be added action and accomplishment.

No one understood Ben Davison's unworthiness more thoroughly than Justin. Because of the influence of his father and the support given to his candidacy by a tricky politician Ben was apparently on the high road to political preferment and honors.

His name was mentioned in the Denver dailies, and his picture was in the county paper.

Philip Davison was pleased, probably Lucy was pleased also, and Justin felt that he really ought to look upon the matter in a kindly and amiable light. Yet, even as he thought so, he felt his heart burning.

"I might have had that nomination, if things had been different!"

That was Justin's thought. He knew to the core of his being that in every way he was better qualified than Ben Davison to fill that important place. He had not only mental but moral qualities which Ben totally lacked. In addition, the position and the honor appealed to his growing desire to be something and do something. It would give opportunity to talents which he was sure he possessed. Denver represented the great world beyond, where men struggled for the things worth while. Ben Davison would go to Denver, become a member of the legislature, and would have the doors of possibility opened to him, when he had not the ability nor the moral stamina to walk through them when they were opened, and he—Justin—would remain—a cowboy.

When Justin reached the town, which consisted of a double row of frame houses strung along the railroad track, he hitched the bronchos to the pole in front of one of the stores and proceeded to the purchase of the groceries required by the housekeeper. That done he walked to the postoffice for the ranch mail. As he came out with it in his hands

and began to look over the county paper, where he saw Ben Davison's name and political qualifications blazoned, he observed several men converging toward a low building. Over its door was a sign, "Justice of the Peace."

"Arkwright's got a trial on to-day," said one of the men, speaking to him. "You ranchers air gittin' pugnacious. Borden has brought suit against Sam Turner for the killin' of them cattle. I s'pose you heard about it?"

Justin's interest was aroused. He was acquainted with both Arkwright and Borden, and he knew of the killing of the cattle, but he had not heard of the lawsuit. Borden's ranch lay over beyond the first mesa, along Pine Creek. It had been established since the Davison ranch. Not all the line between the two ranches was fenced, and the open line Justin had ridden for a time with one of Borden's cowboys.

There were a few settlers along Pine Creek, one of them being Sam Turner, a young farmer from Illinois. Justin remembered Turner well, and Turner's wife, a timid little woman wholly unfit for the life she was compelled to live in this new country. She had a deathly fear of Borden's cowboys, a fear that was too often provoked by their actions. They were chiefly Mexicans and half-breeds, a wild lot, much given to drinking, and often when they came riding home from the town in their sprees they came with their bronchos at a dead run, firing their revolvers and yelling like Indians as they swept by Turner's house. Whenever she saw them com-

ing Mrs. Turner would catch up her little girl in her arms, dart into the house, lock and bar the doors, and pull down the blinds. The cowboys observed this, and it aroused them to even wilder demonstrations; so that now they never passed Turner's without a fusillade and a demoniacal outburst of yells.

The death of the cattle had come about through no fault of Turner. They had simply broken down a fence during a storm, and getting into Turner's sorghum had so gorged themselves with the young plants that some of them had died. It did not seem to matter to Borden that Turner's sorghum had been devoured. In his rage over his loss Turner had threatened violence, and Borden was answering with this suit for damages for the loss of the cattle.

Justin squeezed into the midst of the crowd that already filled the office. Clem Arkwright's red face showed behind his desk, which was raised on a platform. Justin, still thinking of Lucy and Ben, looked at Arkwright with interest. He did not admire Arkwright himself, but Ben Davison thought highly of him, and that was something. A heap of law books was stacked on Arkwright's desk. A pair of pettifogging lawyers had been kicking up a legal dust, and one of them, Borden's lawyer, was still at it. As the lawyer talked, Clem Arkwright took down one of the books and began to examine a decision to which his attention was called.

While Arkwright looked at the decision, the lawyer went right on, pounding the book he held in his hand and shaking his fist now and then at the justice and now and then at Sam Turner and the op-

posing lawyer. Turner sat with his counsel, and at intervals whispered in his ear. Justin had never attended a trial and he found it interesting. His sympathies were with Turner.

From the claims made by Borden's lawyer, it appeared that Sam Turner was wholly in the wrong. He should have guarded his crops or fenced his land. He had done neither, and as a result Borden's cattle had lost their lives and Borden had sustained financial loss. Borden was not required to maintain a fence, nor to employ riders to hold the cattle beyond any certain imaginary line, the lawyer maintained; but he had kept riders so employed, and had built a fence on a part of his range. He had done these things, that his cattle might not become mixed up with cattle belonging to other ranches, and particularly, as it appeared, in pure kindness of heart, that they might not trespass on the farms of such men as the defendant. It was admitted that Turner had a perfect right to live on and cultivate his land; it was his, to do with as he pleased, by virtue of title conveyed to him by the government under the homestead laws. But he was compelled, if he wished to prevent trespass of this kind, to erect and maintain a stock-tight fence, or guard his land in some other substantial way; and having failed to do that, he should be mulcted in damages for the loss sustained by the plaintiff.

Justin was listening with much interest to the argument of Borden's lawyer, when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Turning about he beheld William Sanders.

"We want to see you outside a minute er two," said Sanders.

He tried to smile pleasantly, but there was a queer gleam in his little eyes.

"All right," said Justin, wondering what Sanders could want.

Several farmers and a few of the citizens of the town were awaiting him outside, he discovered, and had sent Sanders in to get him.

"We want to have a talk with you about the election," said one of them. "We'll go into that back room over there; we've got the privilege of using it awhile"

Sloan Jasper shambled up, his hands in his pockets.

"Howdy, Justin!" he exclaimed, with an anxious smile. "I've been talkin' round a bit amongst my friends, and what I've said about you I don't take back for any man."

Somewhat bewildered, Justin accompanied these men into the vacant room they had indicated, back of one of the stores. Here William Sanders established himself at a small table; the doors were closed, the men dropped into seats, and Sanders rapped with his knuckles for order. That queer gleam still shone in his little eyes.

"Gentlemen," he said, rising, "I'm goin' to ask Mr. Jasper to set out the object of this meetin'. Me and him talked it up first, I guess; and he understands it as well as I do, and maybe can set it out better."

Sloan Jasper shambled to his feet, declaring that

he was no speaker; and then proceeded to a heated denunciation of the ranchmen and their methods.

"How many times have they tramped me an' my farm under foot as if we was muck?" he asked. "That trial over there before that scoundrel, Arkwright, is a sample of it. They've run the county till they think they own it. But they don't own me! Justin hyer is a cowboy and can draw cowboy votes. We all think well of him, because we know he can be depended on to do the fair thing by everybody. That's all we're askin'—the fair thing; we don't want to take advantage of anybody, er injure anybody; but we do intend to protect ourselves, and to do it we've got to stand together, and stand up fer men who will stand up fer us. There's certain things that will come before this next legislature in which we're interested. If Ben Davison sets in it as the representative frum this county he'll vote ag'inst us every time. Now, there's a lot o' men in this town who don't like him, ner Arkwright; and all over the county it's the same way. So I say if we'll stand together, us farmers, as one man, and can git somebody that the cowboys like to run ag'inst Ben Davison, we can beat him out of his boots, fer he ain't popular, though the newspaper and his friends is tryin' to make it out that he is. And that's why we're hyer—a sort of delegation of the farmers an' the people of the town who have talked the thing over; an' we're goin' to ask Justin Wingate to make the race fer us ag'inst Ben Davison. If he does it, we'll take off our coats and work fer him until the sun goes down on the day of elec-

tion; and so help me God, I believe as truly as I stand hyer, that we can elect him, and give Ben Davison the worst beatin' he'll ever git in his life."

Sloan Jasper sat down with flushed face, amid a round of applause. Before Justin could get upon his feet, William Sanders was speaking. He said he had come to see that Justin was the man they wanted—the man who could make the race and have a chance of winning; and for that reason he favored him, and would do all in his power for him, if he would run.

Justin was confused and gratified. His pulses leaped at the bugle call of a new ambition. He knew how justly unpopular Ben was. It was possible, it even seemed probable, that if he became the candidate of the men who would naturally oppose the ranching interests he could defeat Ben Davison. But would not such an attempt be akin to treachery? He was in the employ of Philip Davison.

"I don't think I ought to consider such a thing," he urged, in some confusion, without rising to his feet. "Mr. Davison has treated me well. I want to remain on friendly terms with him and with Ben. I couldn't do that, if I ran against Ben. I'm obliged to you, just the same, you know, for the compliment and the honor; but, really, I don't think I ought to consider it."

He saw these men believed that he and Ben Davison were not on terms of good friendship; on that they based their hope that he would become their candidate. They were not to be dissuaded easily,

and they surrounded him, and plied him with appeals and arguments.

"We'll give you till Thursday to think it over," they said, still hoping to win him. "We're going to put some one up against Ben, and you're the one we want."

Though Justin did not retreat from his declaration that it was a thing he should not consider, they observed that he did not say he would not consider it. The stirrings of ambition, the flattery of their words, and the gratifying discovery that the world regarded him now as a full-grown man, kept him from saying that.

Just beyond the town, as he proceeded homeward, he was overtaken by Ben Davison, who had ridden hard after him on his pony. Ben's face was white, his eyes unnaturally bright, and his hand shook on his bridle-rein.

"I've been hearing that talk in town," he began, "and I wan't to know about it!"

Justin felt the hot blood sing in his ears. With difficulty he crowded down the violent temper that leaped for utterance.

"What did you hear?" he asked.

"That you intend to run against me."

Justin gave him a look that made the shining eyes shift and turn away.

"Some of the farmers, and others, want you to run," said Ben.

"Yes, that is true."

"And do you intend to?"

"I haven't said that I did."

"Well, I wan't to know!"

"What if I decline to answer?"

Ben changed his tone.

"It will make trouble for me, if you run. If you keep out of it I've got the thing cinched—they can't beat me, for I will pull the cowboy vote. You might split that vote. I don't say I think you could be elected, for I don't; but it would make me a lot of trouble, and would kick up bad feeling all round."

"In what way?" said Justin, speaking coldly. He was studying Ben closely; he had never seen his face so white nor his eyes so unnaturally bright.

"Well, with father, for one thing. He wouldn't like it; he wants me to be elected, and has already spent a lot of money."

"Ben," said Justin, speaking slowly, "you have yourself to blame largely for this stirring up of the farmers. You have made them hate you. They will put up some one against you, whether I run or not."

"They can't beat me, unless they run some fellow who can swing the cowboy vote, and they know it. That's why they came to you."

"Yes; they said it was."

"You told them you wouldn't run?"

"I told them I ought not consider it."

"Well, that's right; you oughtn't."

"But I want you to understand, Ben, that I have just as good a right to run as you have!"

"I don't think so; not while you're working for father, and when I'm already in the race."

Mentally, Justin acknowledged that this was a point well taken.

"You won't run?" said Ben, anxiously.

Justin hesitated, shifting uneasily on the high spring seat.

"N-o, I hardly think I ought to."

"Thank you! I wanted to make sure."

Ben wheeled his pony, and galloped back toward the town.

"Am I easy?" Justin asked himself, as his eyes followed the receding figure. "But, really, it does seem that I oughtn't to think of such a thing, under the circumstances. Davison would be angry—and I don't suppose Lucy would be at all pleased."

He drove on, turning the matter over in his mind, recalling with pleasure the flattery of the farmers, and wondering why Ben Davison's face looked so unnaturally white and his eyes so bright. He knew that anger alone was not the cause.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE STORM

THE threatened rainstorm broke, bringing early night, as Justin reached home. Lemuel Fogg was at the ranch house with Davison. Fogg's shining photograph wagon had been brought out and a pair of horses hitched to it.

"Ben isn't here," said Davison; "I suppose he's in town, looking after election matters; so, as soon as you can get those things into the house, I want you to ride along the line fence and see that everything is all right, for we don't want any cattle breaking out and making trouble with the farmers just now. Fogg and I are going up the trail together in his wagon. He wants to get a photograph. We'll be near the dam, or a short distance below it, where Jasper's lateral makes out into his fields. I think you will find us at the bridge there over the lateral, and you can come there and make your report, when you've looked at the fence. Report promptly, if there's any trouble."

Fogg came out of the house in oil hat and slicker, buttoned to the chin against the storm. He resembled a yellow, overgrown Santa Claus, minus the beard.

"Hello, Justin!" he cried, advancing and extend-

ing his hand, as Justin swung a bag of meal to the ground. "We're in for a good ground-soaker, I guess. The lightning is beginning to play fine. It's great over there on the mountain. When she gets to going good I'll try to nail one of the flashes down on a negative. I've tried a dozen times and failed; now I'm going to try again."

Having shaken hands, Fogg ran heavily toward the wine-covered wagon; the rain was beginning to roar, and the interior of the wagon, as he knew, was as tight as a house. Then the shining wagon whirled away, with the rain drops glistening on it, revealed by the lightning, which was already waving fiery swords in the sky.

Justin followed on his cow-pony as quickly as he could, garbed like Fogg in a yellow oil slicker, and galloped along the wire fence that ran here toward the town. It was not a pleasant ride. The gusty rain beat in his face and the wind blew a tempest. The lightning, increasing in frequency, showed the fence intact, as far as the lower end of the deep chasm called the Black Cañon, which cut through the mesa above Jasper's. There was no need to go farther than this, for he had inspected that portion of the fence earlier in the day.

The storm was in full swing before he reached Jasper's lateral. He followed it until he came to the tiny bridge that spanned it, and there found the photograph wagon. Sheltered within the wagon, Fogg had trained his camera toward the mountain. There the play of the lightning had become something stupendous. Davison was trying to hold the

bronchos and keep them quiet in the beating rain.

"I've taken several exposures already," Fogg announced, when Justin made his appearance and his report. "If those horses can be kept still another minute I'll try it there just over the dam."

A blinding flash burned across the sky. It was so vivid that Justin closed his eyes against it. The burst of the thunder, like the explosion of a cannon, was thrown back by the stony walls of the mountain, and rolled away, booming and bellowing in the clouds. The thunder roll was followed shortly by a confused and jarring crash.

"I got that flash all right, I think," said Fogg, "and there goes the side of the mountain!"

Landslides occurred occasionally on the sides of the mountain, and Fogg thought this was one.

"No," Davison shouted, "it's—the dam!"

Another crash was heard, accompanied by a popping of breaking timbers; then, with a roar like a cyclone, the dam went out, sweeping down the swollen stream in a great tangle of logs and splintered timbers. Justin galloped toward the stream.

"Better look out there, Justin," Fogg bellowed at him. "That will bring the river out on the jump, and you don't want to get caught by it!"

Justin heard the wagon being driven away from the little bridge. It was an exciting minute, yet he had time to think with regret of what the loss of the dam would mean to the farmers. His reflections were cut short by a scream, followed by a cry for help.

Then in the lightning's white glare he saw on the

ground before him a woman clinging to the prostrate form of a man. Justin galloped wildly, and, reaching them leaped down. To his amazement the woman was Lucy Davison and the man was Ben. She had apparently dragged him beyond the reach of the water that splashed and rolled in a wild flood but a few yards away.

"Help me," she said, without explanation. "He —he is hurt, I think."

Justin had his arms round Ben instantly, and began to lift him. The rain was falling in sheets, and both Lucy and Ben were drenched. Ben began to help himself, and climbed unsteadily to his feet, with Justin's assistance. Only in the intervals between the vivid lightning flashes could Justin see either Ben or Lucy.

"I'm—I'm all right!" said Ben, staggering heavily.

"I'm afraid he was hit by one of the timbers of the dam," Lucy declared.

To Justin she seemed abnormally brave. She took hold of Ben's arm and assisted in supporting him.

"We must get him to the house—to Jasper's," she urged, tremulously.

"The photograph wagon is right over there," Justin informed her. "We'll take him to that. If you'll lead my horse maybe I can carry him."

"I don't need to be carried," said Ben, stubbornly. "I tell you I'm all right. I slipped and fell—that's all. Take your hands off of me; I can walk."

Lucy clung to him, and Justin did not release his

hold. He hallooed now to Davison and Fogg. They did not hear him in the roar of the storm, but by the glare of the lightning they saw the little group swaying near the margin of the wild stream and drove back to discover the meaning of the strange sight. They shouted questions of surprise, as they came up. Justin had not attempted to voice his bewilderment.

Lucy became the spokesman of the group.

"Uncle Philip, we will explain later," she said, with emphasis. "The first thing is to get Ben home."

"Yes, that's so!" Davison admitted, his anxiety for Ben betrayed in his shaking voice.

Ben was helped into the photograph wagon; where he would not lie down, but insisted on sitting in the driver's seat. Justin assisted Lucy into the wagon. It was a large wagon, in which Fogg had lived and slept in the old days when he went about taking photographs and selling curios. Justin wished he might climb in there by Lucy's side, and do something, or say something, that would allay her evident distress. Her voice was unnaturally hard, and her manner singularly abrupt and emphatic. He knew that she was suffering.

And he had not known she was in Paradise Valley! That was the most inexplicable of all—that she should be there and no one on the ranch aware of the fact.

"She must have arrived on the evening train," was his conclusion.

However, that explained little. How did she and

Ben chance to be there by the river? Had they been walking home from the town together—through the storm? Where was Ben's pony? That might have escaped from him, or he might have left it somewhere; but the other question was not to be answered readily. The whole subject was so cloaked in the mysterious that it seemed to defy analysis.

The storm still raged, with sheets of beating rain, with lightning fire and roll of thunder, as the wagon moved swiftly in the direction of the ranch house along the soaked and gullied trail. And behind it, galloping on his cow-pony, rode Justin, pondering the meaning and the mystery of the things he had seen and heard.

Yet through it all there was a certain sense of joy and gratification. He had been able to serve the woman he loved, and she was here at home. The first long, long separation was ended—she was home again.

CHAPTER XV

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING

AS the photograph wagon was halted at the gate which led to the ranch house grounds Lucy Davison spoke to Justin, from the rear of the wagon. Her tones were solicitous, and anxious:

"Justin," she said, "it's too bad to have to ask you to do it in this storm, but I wish you would go back to Mr. Jasper's and get Ben's pony, which he left there in the stable. I have a horse there, too, which I rode out from town. Get both of them, and put them in the stable here. You won't mind the extra trip? I ought to have spoken to you of it before."

Justin was about to assure her that he would go willingly; when she continued, in lower tones:

"And Justin! Don't say anything about getting the horses from there, please. I will tell you why later. And I will explain everything to Uncle Philip."

She had lifted the closed flap that protected the rear end of the wagon, and in the flame of the lightning which still burned across the skies he saw her pale and anxious face. She had always been beautiful in his eyes, but never more so than at that

moment, while making this distressed appeal, even though her clothing exuded moisture and her hair was plastered to her head by the rain. Her pleading look haunted him for hours afterward.

"I'll go," he said promptly, "and I will have the horses here in a little while."

"Thank you, Justin," she said, in a way she had never spoken to him before. "And say nothing to anybody! I think you will not find Mr. Jasper at home; but you know where the stable is, and how to get into it."

The wagon rolled on into the ranch house grounds, where Ben was helped out and into the house; and Justin galloped back along the trail to Sloan Jasper's, having been given another surprise and further food for thought.

When he returned with Ben's pony and the horse Lucy had hired in the town, and had put them in the stable with his own dripping animal, he entered the ranch house. Pearl opened the door for him; and as he removed his wet slicker he heard Philip Davison explaining to Steve Harkness that the farmers' dam had been torn out by the storm. Then Fogg came toward him, and in the light at the farther end of the long hall he saw Lucy, who had changed her clothing and descended from her room. Ben Davison was not to be seen.

"I reckon you're as wet as they make 'em," said Fogg, "but, just the same, if you'll step in here we'll see what I've got on this plate."

He was on his way to the dark room he had fitted up in the house for his photographic work.

Lucy came up to Justin, as Fogg walked on to this room. She looked him anxiously in the face.

"Yes, I brought the horses?" he said, interpreting the look.

"And said nothing to any one?"

"I have spoken to no one."

She thanked him with her eyes.

"You are just soaked," she said, "and you ought to go out to the bunk rooms and get dry clothing at once. I don't want to have you get sick because of that."

"A little wetting won't hurt me, and I'm going in here before I change my clothes. Fogg wants to show me his picture, if he got one."

He followed Fogg, and she went with him, without invitation.

"What sort of picture did he take? I heard him saying something about it."

"He was trying to photograph a flash of lightning. I don't know how he succeeded."

He stopped at the doorway and might have said more, if Fogg had not requested him to come on in and close the door.

"This is the last plate I exposed, and I'm going to try it first," said Fogg, as he made his preparations.

Fogg was an enthusiast on the subject of photography, and had long desired to catch a lightning flash with his camera.

"If I haven't got it now I'll never have a better chance. That flash, just before the dam broke—wasn't it great? The whole sky flamed in a way

to blind a fellow. For a second or so I couldn't see a thing. I had the camera focussed and pointed just right to get that in great shape, it seems to me. Now we'll see the result."

He placed the plate in the tray and turned the developer on it. Justin and Lucy were standing together, with heads almost touching, watching with interest to see the picture appear.

"I've got something, anyhow," said Fogg, when he saw the streak which the lightning had printed stand out, as it were, on the plate. "I think I've got a picture of the dam, too. The camera was trained on the mountain, right across the top of the dam; I thought if I got the lightning I might have a great combination, with the dam and other things showing."

"You've got the lightning flash all right," said Justin, bending forward.

"Yes, that's coming out great; see the image develop!"

He stopped, with a whistle of astonishment.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "What's this?"

A remarkable picture was coming—had come—into view. Fogg stared, with rounded eyes; Lucy uttered a little cry of dismay and fright; Justin caught his breath with a gasp of astonishment.

Small wonder. On the end of the dam nearest the trail two human figures were shown—a man standing on the dam with axe descending and a woman rushing toward him over the slippery logs. The figures were not large, but they were portrayed clearly. They were the figures of Ben and Lucy

Davison, caught there by the camera, in the mad turmoil of the lashing storm.

For a moment not a word was spoken, while the figures seemed to swim more clearly into view. Lucy broke the dead silence.

"May I see that plate, Mr. Fogg?"

Her voice was repressed and hard, as if she struggled with some violent emotion.

"I—don't—why, yes, of course, look at it all you want to. But I don't—"

The sentence was broken by a crash of falling glass. Lucy had either dashed the plate to the floor, or had let it fall in her agitation.

Justin almost leaped when he heard that sound. Lucy looked at him, and for a moment he thought she was going to cry out. But again she spoke, turning to Fogg.

"Well, I'm glad it's broken!" she declared, nervously. "You saw what you saw, Mr. Fogg; but there is no reason why you should remember it. I hope you won't. Perhaps one of the other plates will show a lightning flash. You couldn't have used this, anyway."

"Well, may I be—" Fogg caught himself. "Lucy, you broke that intentionally!"

She turned on him with flashing eyes.

"Mr. Fogg, I did. You saw what was in that picture. You know what it told, or you will know when you think it over. I broke it so that it could never be used or seen by anybody. I'm glad I saw it just when I did. I beg your pardon, but I had to do it."

Was this the Lucy Justin fancied he knew so well? He was astonished beyond measure.

"Yes, I guess you're right," Fogg admitted, as soon as he was able to say anything. "That dam went out, and—yes, I guess you're right! It wouldn't do for that picture to be seen. I've been wondering how you happened to be where we found you, and what you and Ben were doing there."

"Mr. Fogg," her tones were sharp, "don't accuse me even in your mind; I had nothing to do with it, but tried to stop it." She hesitated. "And—whatever you think, please don't say anything to Uncle Philip; not now, at any rate; and don't tell him about the picture."

She turned to the door.

"Justin," she said, and her tones altered, "I'll see you to-morrow; or this evening, if you like."

"This evening," he begged; and following her from the room, he hurried out to the bunk house to shift into dry clothing.

When he saw her again, in the little parlor, she was pale, and he thought she had been crying, but her agitation and her strange manner were both gone. He came to the window where she stood, and with her looked out into the stormy night. The white glare of the lightning illuminated the whole valley at times. About the top of the mountain it burned continually. The cottonwoods and willows were writhing by the stream. On the roof and the sides of the house the dashing rain pounded furiously.

"Justin," she said, as he stood beside her, "I

must explain that to you. You know what that picture meant?"

He wanted to fold her in his arms and comfort her, when he heard her voice break, but he checked the desire.

"I could guess," he said.

"I came down from Denver on the late train, having missed the earlier one."

"I was in town when the earlier one came in," he informed her, regretting for the moment that his too speedy return had kept him from meeting her there. "If I had known you were coming!"

She looked at him fondly, as in the old days. How beautiful she was, though now very pale! He felt that he had not been mistaken in thinking her the most beautiul girl in the world. The East had certainly been kind to her.

"It was to be a surprise for you—you great boy, and for Uncle Philip. I had no idea how it would turn out. In the town I got a horse. The storm was threatening, but I thought I could get home. Just before I reached Jasper's I overtook Ben on his pony. I'm telling you this, Justin, because I know you will never mention it!"

"I will never speak of it," he promised.

"I knew you wouldn't. Now, you must never mention this, either—but Ben had been drinking."

Justin understood now the meaning of Ben's white face and glittering eyes.

"I never knew him to drink before," she went on, "and I shouldn't have known it this evening but for the way he talked. Politics, and that man Ark-

wright, caused it, I'm sure. He was raging, Justin —that is the word, raging—against you and the farmers, and particularly against Mr. Jasper and Mr. Sanders. He claimed they had tried to get you to run against him for the legislature. He talked like a crazy man, and made such wild threats that he frightened me."

Justin wanted to express his mind somewhat emphatically. It seemed best to say nothing; yet that picture of Ben Davison raging against him and frightening Lucy gave him a suffocating sense of wrath.

"The storm struck us just before we reached Mr. Jasper's house, and we turned in there for shelter. Jasper wasn't at home, but the door wasn't locked and we went in."

"Jasper was in town," said Justin.

"Ben put the horses in the stable," she went on, without noticing the interruption. "When he had done that, and had come into the house out of the rain, he began to rave again. After awhile he said he would go out and see how the horses were doing and give them some hay; but I saw him pick up an axe in the yard and start toward the dam. Though the storm was so bad, I followed him, for he had been swearing vengeance against the farmers, and from some things he had said I guessed what he meant to do. When I reached him he was on the dam, chopping at one of the key logs, and had cut it almost in two."

She trembled, as that memory swept over her.

"I rushed out upon the dam, when I saw what

he was doing, and begged him to stop. He tried to push me away, and I came near falling into the water; but I clung to him, and then the axe slipped out of his hands and fell into the stream. The logs began to crack; and that, with the loss of the axe, made him willing to go back with me. We ran, and had just reached the shore when the dam gave way. The ground was slippery, and he fell as we ran toward the house through the storm; and when he lay there like a log, and I couldn't get him up, my nerves gave way, and I screamed. Then you heard me. That is all; except the photograph."

The calm she had maintained with difficulty forsook her as she finished, her voice broke, and her tears fell like rain.

Justin slipped his arm about her.

"You were brave, Lucy!" was all he could find to say.

He had never realized how brave she could be.

"And, Justin, nothing must ever be said about it! It would ruin Ben; it might even put him in prison. I needn't have told you; but I wanted to, and I know you won't say anything about it."

Justin did not stop to think whether this were right or wrong. He gave the promise instantly.

They began to talk of other things. She seemed not to want to say anything more on the disagreeable subject; and Justin was glad to have her talk of herself, of her school life, and her Eastern experiences. Somehow the old sense of intimacy had in a measure departed. He withdrew his hand from about her waist, that was still slender and girlish.

She had been removed to a great distance from him, it seemed. Yet, outwardly, she had not changed, except for the better. She was more womanly, more gracious, now that her tears had been shed and her thoughts had turned into other channels, even than in the old days. Nevertheless, Justin could not at once summon courage to say to her the old sweet nothings in which both had delighted.

"You are still my sweetheart?" he ventured timidly, by and by. "The East hasn't changed you any in that respect, I hope?"

She looked at him earnestly, and her eyes grew luminous.

"No, Justin, not in the least; but there is one thing, which has come to me while I was away. We aren't children any longer."

"I am well aware of that fact," he said; "I have been painfully aware of it, all evening."

She knew what he meant.

"We aren't children any longer; you are a man now, and I am a woman. I heard a sermon the other Sunday, from those verses in which Paul said he had put away childish things and no longer acted or thought as a child. Long ago I told you that I loved you, and promised to marry you some time; I haven't forgot that."

"I shall never forget it!"

"But now that we're no longer children, I think it is your duty to speak to Uncle Philip."

The thought of facing Philip Davison on such a mission flushed Justin's face. Yet he did not hesitate.

"I will do so," he promised; "I ought to have been courageous enough to do it long ago, and without you telling me to."

Instantly he felt taller, stronger, more manly. He knew he was deliriously happy. To feel the soft pressure of her body against his, the electric touch of her hand, and to hear her say that she loved him, and would some time marry him, thrilled him. He looked down into her face, with the love light strong in his eyes. He recalled how he had loved her during her long absence.

"You didn't see any one while you were gone that you thought you could love better?"

He believed he knew what the answer would be, but he awaited it breathlessly.

"I oughtn't to say so, Justin, until after you have spoken to Uncle Philip; but I saw no one I could love half as much as you—no one."

"Yet you saw many men?"

She laughed lightly; it was like sunshine after rain.

"Not so very many as you might think. Mrs. Lassell's Finishing School for Young Ladies is a very exclusive and select place, you must remember. She holds a very tight rein over the girls placed in her charge."

"Is it so bad as that? It's a good thing for me, I guess, that she is so careful; you might get to see some one you could like better than me."

She laughed again, seeing the anxiety he strove to cover.

"If you've been accumulating wrinkles and gray

hairs on account of that you've been very foolish."

"Your last letter didn't seem quite as genial as some others!"

"I didn't underscore the important words, or write them in red ink?"

She became suddenly grave. The events of the evening haunted her like a bad dream.

He stooped low above her bended head.

"I love you," he whispered; "and I'm going to ask you again if you love me, just to hear you say it!"

She looked up at him, tremulously.

"Justin, I love you, and I love you! There, don't ask me again, until after you have spoken to Uncle Philip."

His blue eyes were shining into the depths of her brown ones; and with a quick motion he stooped and kissed her.

"No one was looking, and no one could see us in here," he said, as she gave a start and her pale face flushed rosy red.

"I will speak to Mr. Davison to-morrow," he promised, as if to make amends.

CHAPTER XVI

BEN DAVISON'S TRIUMPH

JUSTIN made that call on Philip Davison in much trepidation, and broached the subject with stammering hesitation and flushed face. Davison was non-committal, until he had heard him through. Yet, looking earnestly at this youth, he saw how prepossessing Justin was in appearance, how clear-cut, frank and intelligent was his face, with its expressive blue eyes, how shapely the head under its heavy, dark-brown hair. Justin's costume was that of a cowboy, but it became him. There was a not unkindly light in Davison's florid face and he stroked his beard thoughtfully, as Justin made his plea. But his words were not precisely what Justin hoped to hear.

"I don't blame you for thinking well of Lucy," he said; "she is a rare girl; and the man who takes her for his wife with my consent must show some qualities that will make me think he is worthy of her. I've thought well of you, Justin, and I think well of you now. That you're a cowboy isn't anything that I would hold against you; a cowboy can become a cattle king, if he's got the right kind of stuff in him. Everything depends on that."

"I intend to do something, to become something,

make something of myself," Justin urged, his face very hot and uncomfortable. "I haven't had time to do much yet, and my opportunities haven't been very good. I've succeeded in getting a pretty fair education."

"But would you have done even that, if Clayton hadn't driven you on to it? You've got brains, and he coaxed you to study, and of course you learned. But in other things you're not doing nearly so well as Ben, for instance. Ben will go into the state legislature this fall, and he's not so very much older than you."

The flush deepened on Justin's face.

"I shall try to make the most of myself," he declared, somewhat stiffly. That reference to Ben was not pleasing.

"See that you do. Then you can come to me later. I shall speak to Lucy about this. There isn't any hurry in the matter, for she has two more years in that school."

He dismissed the matter abruptly, with an inquiry about the line fences and a mention of the destroyed dam.

"I told those farmers their dam wouldn't hold," he declared, with something akin to satisfaction in his tone. "I knew it couldn't, the way they put it together. They wouldn't believe me, for they thought I had some axe to grind in saying it; but now they see for themselves."

Justin wondered what Philip Davison would say if he knew the truth. He did not even comment on

Davison's statement, but left the room as soon as he could do so without brusqueness.

Sloan Jasper, representing the opposition to Ben Davison, came to him the next day, which was Thursday.

"How about that, Justin?" he asked, anxious yet hopeful.

Justin had been given time to think, and his answer was ready.

"It wouldn't be possible for me to run against Ben—it wouldn't be right."

"He ain't fit fer the place, and you know it!"

"I can't run against him, Mr. Jasper."

Jasper was almost angry.

"Well, we'll git somebody that will. You could split the cowboy vote."

"Perhaps I could, but I can't make the race."

"Maybe Davison thinks we're done fer, jist because that dam went out; but he'll soon know better. We'll put in a new dam, and we'll have our rights hyer in the valley; and we're goin' to beat Ben Davison fer the legislature, if talk and votes and hard work can do it."

Sloan Jasper and the farmers were very much in earnest. They found a man who was willing to stand in opposition to Ben Davison, and the campaign which followed was heated and bitter. With sealed lips Justin continued his round of work on the ranch. A word from him, from Fogg, or from Lucy Davison, would not only have wrecked Ben's political prospects, but would have landed him in prison. That word was not spoken. The opposi-

tion exerted its entire strength, but Ben Davison was elected triumphantly.

The day Ben drove away from the ranch on his way to Denver, to become one of the legislators of the state, Philip Davison spoke again to Justin.

"There goes Ben, a member of the legislature! He's not so very much older than you, Justin; yet see what he has accomplished, young as he is."

"Yes, I see!" said Justin, quietly.

BOOK TWO—THE BATTLE

CHAPTER I

COWARDICE AND HEROISM

THOUGH Justin Wingate was no longer connected with the Davison ranch he was not the less concerned when he beheld the sudden flare of flame near the head of the cañon and the cloud of smoke which now concealed it. A fire starting there in the tall grass and sedge might destroy much of the Davison range, and would endanger the unharvested crops and the homes of the valley farmers. Forest fires were ravaging the mountains, and for days the air had been filled with a haze of smoke through which the sun shone like a ball of copper. The drought of late summer had made mountain and mesa a tinder box. Hence Justin turned from the trail and rode rapidly toward the fire.

There had been many changes in Paradise Valley; but except that it had grown more bitter with the passage of time, there had been none in the attitude of the farmers and cattlemen toward each other. William Sanders was still vindictively hostile to the people of the ranch, and they disliked him with equal intensity of feeling. As for Justin, he had

developed rather than changed. He was stronger mentally and physically, better poised, more self-reliant and resourceful. He had come to maturity.

He was on his way to Borden's ranch, with some medicines for one of Clayton's patients there. The distance was long, and he had a pair of blankets and a slicker tied together in a roll behind his saddle. Lucy Davison was in the town, making a call on an acquaintance, and he was journeying by the valley trail, hoping to meet her, or see her, as he passed that way. But thoughts of Lucy fled when he saw that fire. As he rode toward it and passed through the strong gate into the fenced land, he wondered uneasily if any plum gatherers were in the sand-plum thickets by the cañon.

Justin had not proceeded far when he heard a pounding of hoofs, and looking back he beheld Steve Harkness riding toward him at top speed. He drew rein to let Harkness approach.

"Seen Pearl and Helen anywhere?" Harkness bellowed at him.

Helen was the child of Steve and Pearl Harkness, and was now nearly two years old.

"No," said Justin, thinking of the plum bushes. "Are they out this way?"

"I dunno where they air; but they said at the house Pearl come this way with Helen. That was more'n an hour ago. They was on horseback, she carryin' Helen in front of her; and she had a tin bucket. So she must have been goin' after plums. That fire made me worried about 'em."

He rode on toward the plum bushes, and Justin

followed him, through the smoke that now filled the air and obscured the sun. Harkness's horse was the speedier, and he disappeared quickly. As he vanished, Ben Davison dashed out of the smoke and rode across the mesa. In the roar and crackle of the fire Justin heard Harkness shout at Ben, but he could not distinguish the words. Justin called to Ben, repeating what he believed had been Harkness's question, asking if he had seen Pearl and Helen; but Ben did not hear him, or did not wish to answer. He rode right on, as if frightened. And indeed that fire, which pursued him even as he fled, was not a thing to be regarded lightly. Yet Justin wondered at Ben's action, his wonder changing to bewilderment when he saw that a woman's saddle was on the horse Ben rode.

A horrible suspicion was forced upon him. He knew that Ben had deteriorated; had become little better than a loafer about the stores of the little town, consorting with Clem Arkwright and kindred spirits. Arkwright had also changed for the worse. He had lost his position as justice-of-the-peace, and was now often seedy and much given to drinking. He was said to be an inveterate gambler, gaining an uncertain livelihood by the gambler's arts. Ben Davison was never seedy. Whether he obtained his money from Davison or secured it in other ways Justin did not know, but Ben was always well dressed and had an air of prosperity.

Ben was again the candidate of the ranch interests for the legislature. Lemuel Fogg, also representing the ranch interests, had secured for himself a nomi-

nation to the state senate; for which purpose he had become temporarily a resident of the town of Cliveden, some miles away, where he had established a branch of his Denver store.

Justin's desire for justice made him put aside the conclusion almost inevitably forced upon him by that sight of Ben Davison riding wildly away from the fire in a woman's saddle.

Following Harkness toward the plum thickets, where the roar of the fire was loudest, he heard a woman's scream. It was off at one side, away from the fire. Justin pulled his horse about and galloped toward the cry through the pall of smoke. In a few moments he beheld the plump form of Pearl Harkness. Helen was not with her. Seeing Justin, she ran toward him, screaming frantically.

"Helen! Helen!"

Justin stopped his horse.

"What is it? Where is she?"

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know! I've lost her! She was right here a while ago. The fire started, and I left her to get the horse; but the horse was gone, and when I tried to find her I couldn't, the smoke was so thick. I must have got turned round." She started on again, wildly. "Helen! Helen!"

"Can you stay here just a minute? I'll find her, and I'll bring her to you. Stay right here. The fire can't get here for at least ten minutes. Stay right here."

He feared to leave her, yet felt that he must if he hoped to save the child. Pearl Harkness seemed not to hear him. Calling the name of her child she

ran on, in an agony of apprehension, choking and gasping. Lifted high above her by his horse, Justin found breathing difficult. His mind was in a puzzled whirl, when he heard the fog-horn bellow of Harkness's heavy voice. Pearl heard it also, and ran toward Harkness with hysterical cries. Justin rode after her. Harkness appeared out of the smoke like a spectre, his horse at a dead run. When he saw Pearl he drew rein and jumped to the ground.

"Helen! Helen!" she screamed at him, stretching out her hands.

Then, before either Harkness or Justin could reach her, she pitched forward, overcome by excitement and the thick smoke. Harkness lifted her in his strong arms, clinging to his bridle rein as he did so. The bronchos were snorting and uneasy.

"I've got to git her out of here," said Harkness, with tender solicitude. "Where's Helen?"

"She must be right here somewhere; over that way, your wife said. I'll find her."

Harkness glared at the smoke.

"Yes, find her, and find her quick! That fire will be right on top of this place in another minute."

He swung Pearl toward the saddle. Justin assisted him to hoist the heavy woman to the back of the horse, and held her there while he mounted. Harkness took the limp form in his arms.

"We ain't got any time to lose!" he gasped. "Find Helen! For God's sake, save Helen! It will kill Pearl, and me too, if you don't. The fire is right here. For God's sake, save her; I know you'll do it if anybody can."

Justin was in the saddle.

"Save your wife!" he cried. "Save your wife! I'll find Helen! I'll find her!"

"You've got to find her! Don't stop till you find her! I reckon I'd better help you look for her."

He could not abandon Helen; and holding his wife in his arms he rode toward the fire.

"Save your wife!" Justin shouted to him.

He was already moving off, forcing the broncho toward the point where the smoke lay heaviest. Again he shouted to Harkness, begging him to save his wife. Then a moving wall of smoke swept between them.

"Helen! Helen!" Justin began to call, circling swiftly about the spot where Pearl Harkness believed she had left her child.

The heat and smoke were becoming unbearable.

"I must find her!" was his thought, as he recalled Pearl's hysterical screams and the anguished face of Steve Harkness.

Then, as if in a fire-framed picture, he saw her, well up toward the head of the cañon, whither she had fled in a panic of fright. The strong upward pull of the heated air, lifting the smoke for an instant, revealed her, clad in her short dress of striped calico, her yellow head bare.

As the flames flared thus on high, their angry red blending and tangling with the thick black smoke on the rim of the cañon, Justin's broncho became almost unmanageable. He struck it now, pounding his fist against its body, kicking it mercilessly, and jerking like a madman at the sharp bit. Fighting

with the scared broncho, he drove it toward the child.

She heard him call to her; and seeing him, she began to run toward him. She stumbled and fell, and rose crying. Her small face was smeared with soot and tears, with charred plum leaves and with sand. All about her, as the flames and the smoke lifted and fell under the force of the wind, flakes of soot, plum leaves, and burning grass, floated and flew. It was a wonder to Justin that her striped dress was not already ablaze. In a few moments he was at her side.

"I want my mamma!" she wailed, as he leaped down by her. "Where is my mamma?"

She pushed back the tangle of yellow hair that the wind tumbled into her face, and coughed violently. Her chubby hands were stained with tears and soot. She doubled one of them and gouged it into her eyes.

"I want my mamma!"

"I will take you to her," Justin promised, as he tore the blankets and slicker from behind the saddle.

One of the blankets he wrapped about her; the other he threw over his shoulders and secured in place with a pin. The slicker he cast away, fearing its coating of oil would make it inflammable. Having done this, he clambered into the saddle, with the child in his arms.

But the fire had been as busy. A long red prong thrown in the direction of the ranch buildings had widened and was drawing back toward the cañon. It lapped across the open grassy space toward which

he rode before he could gallop a dozen rods, thus hemming them in.

As Justin dashed furiously at this wall of flame, he drew the hood of the blanket well over his head; and while still holding the child closely wrapped, and clinging to the rein, he sought protection for his hands in the folds of the blanket. There was no protection for the horse. Yet he drove it to the plunge, which it took with blind and maddened energy.

The fire flashed about him and roared like a furnace. The flesh of his hands and face cried out in pain and seemed to crisp under the lash of that whip of flame. Giddy and reeling, he set his teeth hard and gouged his booted heels furiously into the broncho's flanks. The blanket seemed to be burning about his head.

For a few brief moments after that he was but half conscious; then he felt the broncho fall under him, and was pitched from the saddle. He staggered to his feet, still holding the child. His blanket had been torn aside by the fall; and he saw that he had broken through the cordon of flame, and that the fire was behind him. The broncho lay quivering where it had dropped, having run to the last gasp. He could not have recognized it. Its hair was burnt off, and blood gushed from its nostrils.

Helen seemed to be uninjured, though she cried lustily. Still resolved to save her from the fire, Justin began to stagger with her across the unburned grass. As he did so he heard a shout, followed by galloping hoofs. He saw the horsemen dimly as

they rode toward him, and he ran in their direction. As he thus ran on he fell.

When he came to himself he was on a horse in front of some one who clasped him firmly about the body. Horses' feet were rustling noisily over the grass. The sky was black with smoke; its taste was in his mouth, it cut his lungs and pinched his quivering nostrils. His face and eyes, his hands, his whole body, throbbed with the smarting pain of fire.

"You're still all right, air ye?"

It was the voice of Dicky Carroll, one of the cowboys.

It was Dicky's arms that held him, and he was on Dicky's horse. He drew himself up, looked about, and saw Steve Harkness galloping at Dicky's side with Helen in his arms.

"He's got to be made all right if he ain't," he heard Harkness shout. "He's too gamy to be let die!"

CHAPTER II

THE HARVEST OF THE FIRE

THE fire ravaged a large part of the mesa range. In the valley it did small damage, for the farmers checked it there by flooding the canals and laterals with the water they had stored for the fall irrigation. Some of their hay land was swept over, and a few stacks of alfalfa were destroyed, but no house was burned. One of the destroyed stacks belonged to William Sanders. And it did not mitigate his hostility to the people of the Davison ranch to know that the fire had been started by Ben Davison.

Ben was voluble with excuses and explanations. He stated that he had gone to the plum bushes by the rim of the cañon. There, tossing away a smoked-out cigarette, it had fallen into some dry grass, which at once leaped into flame. He had tried to stamp out the fire, and failed. Startled by the rapidity with which it spread, and by the increasing heat and smoke, he had fled. As he did so he came on a loose horse, bearing a woman's saddle. No one was near it, or to be seen, and he supposed very naturally that the rider had let the horse get away. At any rate, it offered him a chance to escape from the fire, which he believed to be ringing him in, and he

accepted it. He did not hear Harkness shout at him, he said, nor Justin. Riding toward the ranch house, he had encountered the cowboys who were hastening to the fire, and had turned back with them, thus meeting Steve Harkness, who was holding his wife in front of him and had ridden out of the smoke. And he had continued with the cowboys, and was with them when Justin appeared with Helen.

Dicky Carroll's version, poured into the ears of Justin Wingate as he lay convalescing from the effects of his burns, held some peppery additions:

"Gee! wasn't Harkness wild; wasn't he hot? He was hotter than the fire he had run from. He was simply crazy. He didn't say anything to Ben when we first met him, fer there wasn't time right at that minute. But he come on him at the ranch house. That was after you was carried in, and while Doc Clayton was fingerin' you over to see if you was all there. Ben was standin' by the door; and Harkness stepped up to him, his face as white as a sheet, where it wasn't all smoked up; and he says to him, jest like this:

"'Damn you fer a sneakin' coward! You took my wife's horse, and left her and Helen in that hell of fire to be roasted to death!' And then he hit him square on the mouth and knocked him up ag'inst the side of the house.

"After that he never said a word to Ben, but as soon as the Old Man come he told him what he'd done, and handed in his resignation as ranch foreman. The Old Man was as hot as Harkness, the fellers say that saw it; fer a minute he looked as

swelled up and porkupiny as a horned toad. Then he ca'med down. 'I'll see Ben,' he says, jest like that. And he did see Ben; and of all the roastin's, that feller got it; things couldn't have been much warmer fer him if he'd let the horse go and stayed in the fire. And Harkness is still foreman. He's too good a man, you see, fer Davison to lose. But there's one thing to be said fer Ben, which I reckon he don't want to say fer hisself. He was drinkin' that day, up by the cañon. Nobody but a drunk man or a fool would have throwed that burnin' cigarette butt into grass as dry as that. Ben was too drunk to realize the danger, and I reckon he was too drunk to know or care whose horse he took. But he was middlin' sober, I tell you, when we met him. The scare did that. He was scared good. And I will say fer him that he turned right round, though he'd been ridin' like the devil was after him, and went back with us, and afterward he done his part in puttin' out the fire."

Lucy Davison must have heard this story from Pearl Harkness; and it was possible, as Justin knew, that she had seen Harkness strike Ben. Yet she said nothing to Justin on the subject, but left him to his own conclusions.

In one way, the aftermath of that unpleasant experience was not unpleasant to Justin. Much of the time he had for a nurse no less a person than Lucy Davison herself. Whether engaged in the actual work of nursing him or otherwise, she made constant and solicitous inquiries which strengthened and soothed him more than anything within the

range of Clayton's skill. Her presence would have more than counter-balanced the suffering but for one thing. He knew that his appearance was worse than grotesque. Even a comely youth loses all comeliness, with his eyelashes and eyebrows gone, and his face disfigured by burns and bandages.

Somewhat reluctantly Justin was at length obliged to confess himself so nearly well that he could go home with Clayton. Thanks to the latter's skill he had escaped permanent disfigurement. Nevertheless, his injuries confined him for some time to the house, and to short walks and rides near it.

Lucy made him many visits, and brought him the news and gossip of the valley. She had "finished" at Mrs. Lassell's school, so was not to go East again, and that was a pleasant thought to both. Philip Davison was deep in his plans for Ben's advancement, and Fogg was working earnestly to secure his own election. The thing that sorely troubled both Davison and Fogg now, as it also troubled Ben, was the story which was spreading, that Ben had cut the dam the night of the storm.

"I hope no one will think I told that!" thought Justin.

Yet the repositories of that secret, he was sure, were Lucy, Fogg and himself.

Justin inquired concerning the political action of the farmers. Apparently, they had not desired to turn to him again; they had chosen a candidate, and were working for Ben's defeat.

When Fogg called at Clayton's, Justin, in a private conversation with him, declared with heat that

he had remained silent about the dam, even though that silence had distressed his conscience. Fogg, tricky himself, hence ready to impute trickery to others, might not have believed Justin, if it had not come out soon that Ben had given the story wings himself, as he boasted one night, while he sat gambling and drinking with Clem Arkwright and some cronies in the town. Ben denied this strenuously to his father. But after that, the suspicions of Lemuel Fogg against Justin were blown to the wind.

There was some wild talk among the farmers of prosecuting Ben, which ended in talk, for there was a lack of first-hand proof. But to the work of defeating him at the polls they had set themselves with might and main.

Then, as suddenly as the fire itself, a surprising change came in the political situation. From the first, as now appeared, the campaign against Ben had been engineered craftily by crafty men. At the last moment, the name of the opposition candidate was taken down, and another name hoisted in its stead—the name of Justin Wingate, used without his knowledge. Cowboys made hurried night rides, moving with secrecy. Ben's conduct at the time of the fire had laid up for him in their hearts a store of smothered rage and contempt, which now found expression. Everywhere the cowboys rallied to the support of Justin Wingate—and he was elected.

Because he was confined so closely to the house and its vicinity, but more because the sudden movement to elect him was sedulously concealed both

from him and from Clayton, Justin's election came to him as a stunning surprise. His astonishment was mingled with pain and anxiety. The hopes of the Davisons were in the dust. He knew that Ben must be humiliated beyond measure, and he feared that Davison would resent it as a personal insult to his son and an act of treachery. And what would Lucy think? That was, to Justin, the most important of all.

Clayton brought him the news early on the morning after the election. Justin, who had been walking about in the yard enjoying the bright autumn sunshine, dropped to a seat on the doorsteps, startled, weak and unnerved. Clayton began to make the thing clear to him.

"After that affair, the cowboys couldn't stand Ben Davison, and the story that he cut the dam killed him with a good many of the town people, as well as the farmers. When your name was mentioned, the suggestion caught as quickly as that fire Ben started. At Borden's ranch, at Wilson's, at Lindborg's, and all over the county, where the story of the fire had gone, the thing was taken up by the cowboys; and it was all done so quickly and quietly that neither Davison nor Ben, nor even Fogg, knew a thing of it, until it was too late. I'm as surprised as you are; I knew of the talk against Ben, but I didn't dream of this."

Lemuel Fogg, shrewd and astute, hurried to Davison's, as soon as he heard the astounding news. Davison was in a white rage. But for Fogg's timely intervention he would have discharged all of his

cowboys at once, together with Steve Harkness. They were angry, and they stood ready to go.

"Don't do it!" Fogg begged. "We can't fight all of the cowboys of the county, and they all went against Ben. The thing to do is to make Justin see that the cowboys—and in that sense the ranch interests—elected him. Though the cowboys united with the farmers this time, they are not naturally with them; Justin knows that. We mustn't let him go to Denver feeling that he owes his election to the farmers. He is a cowboy, and if we work him right we can hold him to our side."

"I can't believe yet but that Justin knew all about it," said Davison, angrily.

"I don't think he did; but whether he did or didn't, he's elected."

"He may not accept the place; he might give way, if pressure is brought to bear on him?"

"Don't you believe that for even a minute," said Fogg. "I know Justin. He's not a fool, and he'd be a fool if he did that. He will go to Denver and sit in that legislature, and we want him to go as our friend, not our enemy. Don't stir up the cowboys, don't make trouble with them; just give me a free hand—I think I can work this thing."

Lemuel Fogg set about the work at once. He suggested to certain men that it would be a good idea for the friends of the ranch interests to meet publicly at Clayton's that evening and show Justin that they regarded him as their friend, and not their enemy; and, having done that, he walked over to Clayton's to see Justin himself, and congratulate

him. Some of the farmers, he learned, had already visited Clayton's for that purpose; and he felt that for the ranchmen to permit the "farming jays" to get ahead of them in that way was a tactical mistake.

So Fogg came into Clayton's little study, where he had been so many times, and sat in the big chair which had so often nursed his rotund body. His round freckled face oozed amiability, and his big laugh was cheery and infectious, as he congratulated Justin.

"You ought to have been nominated regularly in the first place, instead of Ben," he asserted. "It was a mistake to put Ben up, after that trouble about the fire. The cowboys wouldn't have him. They've elected you, and they're roaring with joy. I suppose Ben has gone into hiding, for I haven't seen him anywhere this morning."

He laughed, as if this were a joke.

"Ben's defeat and your election surprised me, of course," he admitted, "but as soon as I had time to think it over I felt there wasn't anything to be sorry about, for you'll make a good deal better representative. You're better educated all round than Ben is, and you've got the confidence of the people, which as this vote shows he hasn't."

Justin liked Fogg, in spite of the known defects of his character. He had believed that Fogg would be instantly alienated; yet here he was, as friendly and as jovial as ever, not disturbed in the least, apparently, by the strange turn of events.

"It's a thing that doesn't come every day to a

young man that hasn't gone gunning for it, and it's up to you to make the most of it," Fogg continued. "This may be the stepping-stone that will lead you into the governor's chair some day. You can't tell, you know. Make as many friends as you can, and as few enemies as you can. Ben made enemies, without making friends, and you see where he is. It's a good lesson to any young man. I'm glad I'm to be in the legislature with you; in the senate, of course; but I'll be right there, where I can see you every day; and if I can help you in any way, by advice or otherwise, why, I'm yours truly, to command to the limit."

"The position is what I should have sought, if I could have had the choosing," said Justin, "yet I feel troubled about it, coming to me as it did."

"You wouldn't think of refusing to accept it, now that it's yours?"

"No, I shouldn't want to do that, and it wouldn't be right to the men who voted for me."

"I felt sure you wouldn't," Fogg admitted significantly, shifting comfortably in his big chair.

"I'm too bewildered to know what to say, or what to think; I only know that it's a great surprise, and that I'm troubled as to how it will be regarded by the Davisons."

"Well, of course you must expect them to be a little sore over it, as it comes so close home to them. But Davison is a pretty square sort of man, as I've found, and he'll look at it in the right light, unless you give him occasion to do otherwise. Ben will be bitter, I've no doubt; but there's no help for that,

and if I were you I shouldn't let it trouble me. He'll get over it after awhile. If his head is level he'll know that he went up against a cyclone for which you were not responsible and he'll keep still."

Fogg's attitude eased Clayton's anxiety. The turbulent conflict he foresaw seemed about to be avoided.

"I've spoken to some of my friends," Fogg went on, "and there will be a crowd up here to-night. I reckon you'd better rub up a little something in the way of a speech, Justin. And if you happen to hear a brass band filling the air with march music, don't get scared and bolt like a stampeding broncho, for that will be the new band they've organized in town coming up to serenade you. You're a public character now, and you've got to stand such things."

Fogg left Clayton's with growing confidence. He believed that Justin would be pliable, if properly manipulated.

"If I can only jolly him along here I can manage him when we get to Denver," was his thought.

Though Justin was strong enough now to take short rides about the valley, he did not visit the Davison ranch that day. Lucy was temporarily absent from home, he was glad to know. So he shut himself up at Clayton's and tried to take stock of the situation. His thoughts were chaotic. The thing he would have chosen had come to him, but in a manner so strange that he could hardly be sure it was desirable. As he did not know what he ought to say to the people who would gather there that evening, he did not try to put together the few

thoughts in the way of a speech which Fogg had suggested.

For Paradise Valley that was a great gathering. At nightfall the new band came down from the town, braying its loudest. Horsemen, and men on foot and in carriages, seemed to spring out of the ground. They overflowed the little house, for Clayton's hospitality urged them to make themselves at home anywhere, and they filled the yard, yelling lustily. Fogg set up some gasolene torches, and came out of the house, accompanying Justin.

The noise, the cries for him to appear, the music of the band, the leaping call of aroused ambition, tingled Justin's blood. He felt his soul swell, when he heard that roar. It was a feeling wholly new and he could not define it, but it caused him to lift his head and step with sure precision as he passed through the doorway with Fogg to the little piazza in front of the house.

Before him some farmers, in whose midst he saw Sloan Jasper, were bellowing their delight. Farther out he saw Steve Harkness, by the light of the torch which flared red in his face. At Harkness's side was Dicky Carroll; and both were yelling with wide-open mouths, and swinging their big hats, as they sat on their horses. Justin knew that he trembled, but it was not because he distrusted himself, or feared to face these people.

As he came out upon the piazza, Fogg, the diplomat, took him affectionately by both hands, his fat face beaming with simulated joy, as he introduced to these people the newly-elected- their newly-

elected—representative. Fogg's remarks took the form of a wordy panegyric, whose chief note was that, as Justin had been elected by what seemed to be a spontaneous uprising of the whole people, he would go to Denver as the representative of the whole people, and not of any party or faction.

Called on for a speech, Justin spoke but a few words. He was sensible, he said, that a very high honor had been conferred on him, and conferred most unexpectedly. For it he thanked his friends and all who voted for him. He had not sought the place, and in the manner in which it had come to him there were some painful things, on which it was not necessary for him to dwell; but now that he was elected, he would try to serve his constituency to the best of his ability and do what was right. The position having come to him wholly unsought, he felt that he stood pledged to nothing except honesty and the good of the state and the county.

Dicky Carroll's small clean-shaven face and beady eyes shone with supreme satisfaction. Dicky was a firm admirer of Justin, and he was delighted to be able to swing his hat and yell for a cowboy, one of his own kind as he thought, who had been elected to the legislature largely by cowboy votes. He was swinging his hat and yelling even before Justin concluded; and the speech, brief as it was, had been punctuated with cheers.

Fogg thanked the people for their kindness, and with fat freckled hand patted Justin on the shoulder much as he would have patted a fine young horse he was grooming for the races. Clayton looked on

with his quiet smile, pleased to have Justin so praised and cheered, yet anxious.

Then the people and the brass band went away. Only Harkness and Dicky Carroll stayed, for a few words with the "cowboy" whom they had helped to elect. They did not intend that Fogg should have Justin all to himself.

CHAPTER III

LEES OF THE WINE

THE next morning Justin rode over to the ranch house to see Lucy. He desired to know how she felt about his sudden elevation, by which Ben had been thrust down. Near the crossing, where the bare boughs of the cottonwoods were tossing in the autumn wind, he encountered Philip Davison. The ranchman drew rein. Justin had a sense of uneasiness, as he lifted his hat respectfully to his former employer.

"Justin," Davison spoke sharply, "we want to know how you stand. I heard from that meeting last night, and from what you said there nobody can tell. Fogg says you're all right, but I'd like to hear you say so."

Davison disliked circumlocution, being as direct in his methods as Justin himself. He had yielded reluctantly to the restraining hand of Fogg. Now, meeting Justin thus, he formulated his doubt and his question. His florid face had taken on added color and his blue eyes began to flash. Except for that sudden fire he looked tired, and older than Justin had ever seen him.

"Speak up, speak up!" he commanded testily, as Justin hesitated. "For myself I want to know just

what to expect. Are you with us, or against us? You can't be both."

Justin did not want to speak up, for he did not want to break with Philip Davison. He still held for him much of the strong admiration he had cherished in his youth.

"Having been elected without my knowledge or wish, I shall go to Denver untrammeled," he said, still hesitating. "How I shall vote will depend upon the questions that come up for settlement."

"That's a fool's answer," Davison declared. "Are you against the range, or are you for it? Will you support the interests of the cattlemen, or the interests of the farmers?"

His words flushed his face still more and made his eyes very bright There were fleshy pads under those blue eyes, and the cheeks below the pads looked flabby. Justin thought of Ben. In some respects the father and the son were alike. Yet Ben was smaller, had a weak face, and little of the towering bulk of his father, who was as tall as Justin himself. And thoughts of Ben, humiliated by defeat, of Lucy, together with the old regard, made him oblivious to the harsh words and harsher tones. Yet evasion was not possible.

"I don't think I ought to be called on to declare myself before I know just what the issues are and in what shape they will be presented," he urged. "But you know my sentiments, Mr. Davison. You know I quit the ranch not because I did not wish to work for you, but simply because I——"

"Because you were a fool; because the work of

branding a bawling calf made you sick at the stomach; because you couldn't stand it to see a starving cow wandering about in a blizzard with nothing to eat! You think——"

"Mr. Davison——"

"You think the cattle business is cruel and brutal, and——"

"I think cattle raising as it is conducted on the open range is cruel. I can't help that."

"And you think the farmers are the only people! You think the cattlemen are——"

"I sympathize with the farmers. Perhaps that is because they are poor men and need sympathy."

"You will vote with them!" Davison lifted his voice and shook his finger in Justin's face, leaning forward in the saddle. "After all I've done for you, Justin! There is a contemptible conspiracy on foot in this state to ruin the cattle business, and it has your sympathy. I have always been your friend, and Fogg is your friend; yet you'd vote us into poverty to-morrow, just on account of Clayton's idiotic notions. I'm done with you. You needn't ride on over to the house, for I don't want you there. There is no one there who does want you. I hope you understand that. A man who is a man doesn't go where he isn't wanted. I wash my hands of you!"

Having lost his temper, Philip Davison began to rave.

"Yet you owe your election to ranch influences," he shouted. "You gained your place through the defection of the cowboys from Ben. They persisted in misunderstanding what he did at the time of the

fire, and they played the sneak, riding over the country by night and banding themselves together to put him down. If you lent yourself to that, it——"

"I did not lend myself to it, Mr. Davison," Justin protested, earnestly. "I did not know anything about it."

"Yet you profit by it, you profit by it; and the receiver of stolen goods is as bad as the thief."

Fogg had beheld this collocution from the ranch house, and now he galloped up, his fat body swaying heavily in his creaking saddle. Though perturbed, his round fat face beamed like a kindly sunset.

"How are you, Justin; how are you?" he cried. "Hope that racket at Clayton's didn't rob you of your sleep last night. It was a successful meeting, and I'm glad that it was, having had something to do with getting it up." He mopped his hot forehead with his handkerchief. "Davison, a word with you! The Deep River Company write that they want to buy some of our cattle."

Fogg's hand was again on the wheel. Justin was glad to ride on, for Davison's savage assault had left him breathless. He was hurt, but tried hard not to be angry. He was still determined to see Lucy, even though Davison's words practically forbade him the house. Ben was absent so much from the ranch now that Justin hardly expected to meet him; yet he did meet him, in front of the ranch house door. Ben had long since discarded cowboy clothing, and he had lost much of the cowboy tan, his face being now white and unhealthy-looking, as if bleached by late

hours and artificial lights. It took on a surly look, when he saw Justin.

"I shouldn't think you'd care to come over here now," he said, curtly. "If it's pleasant for you, it isn't pleasant for me."

"I hope we can be friends," Justin urged. "I'm sure I want to be yours."

He had not recovered his equanimity, and his face was flushed.

"Well, I don't want to be yours! You may deny it if you want to, but you played me a mean, dirty trick. You probably had it in mind, when you put up that melodramatic exhibition at the fire."

Justin found great difficulty in keeping his temper. Hot words burned on his trembling lips.

"I won't talk with you, Ben," he declared, hoarsely. "Is Lucy in? I should like to see her."

"Find out if she's in," Ben snapped, and turned toward the corrals.

Lucy met Justin at the door. Though she smiled in welcome, he could see that she was troubled.

"Don't mind what Ben says," she urged, as she took Justin's hat and then led the way to the sitting room.

"He was crusty," said Justin, "but I can't blame him."

Having gained the sitting room she turned to Justin, admiration in her troubled eyes.

"Justin, I ought to be proud of you, and I am—I can't help being—but this is, in a way, very unfortunate and distressing. Ben wasn't worthy of that place, as I know only too well, and as you

know; but he is so very bitter over his defeat, and Uncle Philip is the same. Ben has been in a stubborn rage ever since the election, and has said some sharp things to me about it—as if I could help it, or had anything to do with it!"

"I'm sorry." He took a chair. "I suppose I've lost Mr. Davison's good-will entirely. When I met him a few minutes ago he forbade me the house. But I wanted to see you, and came on."

"I suppose you will accept the position?"

"Can I do otherwise?"

"I shouldn't want you to refuse it. The people chose you, over Ben, and even though it was unexpected, I suppose you ought to serve. Ben is alone responsible for his defeat. Uncle Philip will not believe the things which we know to be true, and he thinks Ben ought to have been elected. Yet I do hope," she looked at Justin earnestly, "that you will not feel that you *must* vote against the cattlemen in everything, in the legislature?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Uncle Philip declares that you mean to."

"It will depend, I fancy, upon the general action of the legislature—upon the measures and bills that may be introduced, and the candidates who are presented for senator. I don't expect to take any active part against the ranchmen."

"The farmers expect you to."

"I'm opposed to the ranchmen on some points. You know how I feel; and of course I shall have to be guided by what I think is right. I don't see how I can do anything else."

"Uncle Philip says certain bills will come up, aimed at the free range; and he declares that if the free range is taken away or curtailed he will have to go out of business. He can't fence against everybody."

"On the other hand, what about the farmers?"

"There aren't so very many of them, and their holdings are small. They might fence their land. The ranchmen were here first. You'll remember that?"

"I'm not likely to forget it." He settled back easily in his chair. "That's been dinned in my ears a good deal, already."

"It's a serious matter," she urged. "My sympathies are with the ranchmen; because I'm a ranch girl, I suppose, and have always lived on a ranch."

"And it's because I've seen so much of ranching that my sympathies are not with the ranchmen, aside from Mr. Davison himself. I should dislike to do anything to injure him, or displease him. But the ranching business, as it is now carried on, is, I fancy, the thing around which the fight in Denver will rage, if there is any fight. You know yourself, Lucy, that in a certain sense the ranchmen are lawbreakers. The trouble is, Mr. Davison doesn't stand alone. It is not any one ranchman, but the system."

"That's why I'm disturbed by the situation."

"A long time ago," he said, seeming to change the subject, "you asked me to go to your uncle and put to him a certain momentous question. His answer was virtually a command that I should do something and become something. This opportunity

has come, and it would be a weakness not to make the most of it. I shall trust that I won't have to do anything to turn your uncle against me completely; but," he regarded her earnestly, "I hope in any event nothing can ever come between you and me."

He arose and stood beside her.

"Justin," she said, looking up at him, "that does not need an answer; but I'm going to ask you not to be stubborn when you go to Denver, that is all. You do get unreasonably angry, sometimes, just like Uncle Philip; and when you do, you become stubborn. You don't mind if I say this? If the struggle we fear comes, will you promise me not to permit yourself to get angry and stubborn about it? There will be many things said, I've no doubt, that will try you. But just think of me here, a ranch girl, and your best friends ranch people; the cowboys, who regard you so highly, didn't vote for you because they were opposed to the ranchmen, but simply because they didn't like Ben. You'll remember these things, won't you?"

He drew her to him.

"Lucy," he said, as he put his arm about her and kissed her, "I shall be thinking of *you* all the time. I was almost afraid to come over here to-day, but I see I had nothing to fear."

"And do you know why?"

"Because you love me even as I love you."

"Then you won't forget—you won't forget—that I am a ranch girl, and that my interests, and yours too if you but knew it, are ranch interests!"

"I will not forget," he promised.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE WHIRLPOOL

THE conflicting interests had so shaped themselves before Justin went to Denver that he knew it would be impossible for him to vote on certain questions with the representatives of the ranchmen. He reached this decision, after many long talks with Doctor Clayton, in the quiet of the doctor's study. Yet he maintained a silence, trying to himself, which Clayton deemed discreet; and he went to Denver with many misgivings.

He had no sooner set foot in the hotel when Fogg's smiling face made its appearance.

"Good; you're here!" Fogg cried. "Now I'll see that you have a first-class room. These hotel people will poke you off into any old corner, if you don't watch them."

He seized Justin's valise, but relinquished it to the colored boy who came forward to take it, and walked with Justin to the clerk's desk, where he made known with confidential words and gestures that his friend, Justin Wingate, the representative from Flatrock, was to have a good room, in a good location. And he went up with Justin to the room, to make sure that he had not been swindled by the wicked hotel men.

"This will be all right," he declared, joyously. "My room is on the same floor. You must come in and look at it."

Justin went in, and they talked awhile. Fogg did not ask him any questions, but seemed to assume that there could be no divergence of opinion between them on any vital point; they were old friends, and they understood each other!

On the mantel was a copy of that photograph of Justin and Mary Jasper, taken on the occasion of Fogg's first visit to Paradise Valley. Fogg had put it there, to be seen, that it might further cement the ties that he hoped would bind Justin to him. It would bring back memories of pleasant days, he believed. It brought back, instead, memories of Peter Wingate and Curtis Clayton. When that picture was taken, the ranchmen had not invaded Paradise Valley. Sloan Jasper was tilling his little fields by the river undisturbed by the Davison cattle. And Jasper had been one of Wingate's staunchest friends and admirers!

"You'll find things a bit new here, of course," said Fogg, as he returned with Justin to the latter's room; "but I know Denver like a book, and I'll be glad to help you in any way I can."

Yet even Lemuel Fogg, observing that Justin did not say much, had an uneasy sense of insecurity.

"These quiet men do a lot of thinking," was his troubled conclusion, "and they're likely to be hard to manage, when they get crooked notions in their heads. I'll have to keep my eyes on him, and

I'll get some other fellows to help me. We've got to swing his vote; we've simply got to do it!"

To Justin's inexperienced eyes Denver was in a condition of political chaos. He was not accustomed to crowds, and at first they annoyed and bewildered him. Caucuses were apparently being held in every corner. Ranching interests, mining interests, agricultural interests, each seemed to have a host of champions. But the thing that excited every one, whether cattlemen, farmer, or miner, was the coming election of a United States senator.

Early on the day after his arrival, he found himself drawn into a caucus held in the interests of the cattlemen. Fogg piloted him into it adroitly, wishing to commit him irrevocably to that side. Justin sat down and looked about, not knowing what was to be done. Men came to him with friendly words, and were introduced by Fogg. A chairman was appointed, and the meeting began, with speeches. Their drift soon filled Justin with uneasiness. Having listened awhile, he arose nervously in his place. He did not wish to be misunderstood, or put in a doubtful position.

As he stood up, thoughts of Lucy Davison came to trouble him; and, knowing that every eye was trained on him, he became somewhat disconcerted. Fogg, watching him closely, saw his face flush to a deep red. Yet even Fogg, consumed by anxious expectancy, did not fail to note the commanding flash of the blue eyes and the stiffening of the lithe, erect form of this young man from the remote ranges of Paradise, as he began to speak. There was nothing

rural or awkward in his manner. His bare shapely head with its masses of dark hair, his clear-cut profile, and his straight supple form clad in a neat business suit of dark gray, spoke of anything but verdant inexperience.

Though he began in hesitation, having begun he did not falter, and he did not palter; but expressed himself simply, as an honest man expressing honest opinions without thought of subterfuge. He did not go into details, and he did not explain, further than to declare that he had not sought an election; but, having been elected unpledged, by the combined votes of farmers, cowboys, and citizens of the town, in a revolt against a candidate they did not like, he still stood unpledged, and would vote as his conscience dictated in all things. He was not to be considered, he said, as belonging to the party or interests represented by this caucus, and if he had known that those attending it were supposed to be pledged to do the will of the majority he would not have been there. They must understand his position. He would not deceive them.

Justin did not expect to create a sensation when he delivered that brief speech, but it was like hurling a bomb. Of all the men there Fogg was apparently the most surprised and hurt. He came to Justin immediately, as the caucus began to break into groups, and while Justin was trying to get out of the room. Angry men were shouting questions at Justin. Fogg resolved to maintain his conciliatory attitude.

"You're making a mistake," he said, in a low tone, hooking a finger in Justin's buttonhole in a

friendly manner. "You'll live to regret it. You're a young man just entering political life. You're educated and you've got ability; and a young man of education and ability can make almost anything of himself, in a country like this. But not if he starts out in this way. You've got to stand with somebody. Don't lose your head now. We're the strongest party. Stand with us. We're going to win this fight, and you can't afford to be on the losing side."

"Fogg," said Justin, looking almost angrily at him, "I won't be pulled and hauled about by you nor any other man. I'm not trying to control you, and you can't control me. I came up here untrammeled. When it comes to voting in the house of representatives I intend to listen to the arguments for and against every measure, and then I shall make up my mind and vote for whatever seems to me to be right."

"You can't do that, Justin," Fogg urged. He was nervously solicitous. "Legislatures are run by majorities, by parties. If every man stood by himself nothing could be accomplished. Sometimes we must vote for measures we don't like in order to help along measures we do like. In a place like this men have to stand together. You can't afford to herd by yourself, like an outcast buffalo. You'll want to come up here again, or you will want an office of some kind. Now don't be quick, don't be nervous and gunpowdery; think it over, think it over."

He patted Justin on the shoulder. He was much

shorter than Justin and had to reach up, and it was a comical motion.

Justin released himself from Fogg's grasp, and though men were still shouting at him and trying to reach him, he moved on out of the room without speaking to any one.

To his surprise, the tenor of his speech in the caucus seemed to be known everywhere almost immediately. Men came to him; some arguing with him, others praising him. He went out into the street to escape them. Returning, he was thinking of retreating to the privacy of his room, when a newsboy rushed through the corridor yelling, "Extra! All about the defection of the representative from Flatrock County!"

Justin Wingate's "defection" was not an hour old, yet here it was blazoned in print. He snatched one of the papers and made for his room, where he read it in a state of exasperated bewilderment, for he found himself denounced in unmeasured terms. This paper was the organ of the cattlemen. "Scare heads" above the news columns of the first page informed an astonished world of cattlemen that a Judas Iscariot had arisen suddenly in their midst to betray them with an unholy kiss. In a brief paragraph on the editorial page Justin was spoken of as "The Cattlemen's Benedict Arnold." Elected chiefly by cowboy votes, he was, the paper said, preparing to "sell them out."

Justin threw down the paper. Newsboys were yelling in the street. He left the room, thinking to get another paper. As he made his way toward the

hotel office a smiling little man tapped him on the shoulder. He saw Fogg advancing with one of the offensive newspapers in his hands, and scarcely noticing the little man he turned about, seeking a way of escape, and found himself in another room. The little man closed the door behind Justin; and the men before him, rising from their chairs, began to cheer.

This was a caucus of the opposition, and Justin discovered that he was being hailed as an ally, and was expected to say something. He would declare himself to them, he resolved suddenly, even though these men might not like what he said, or the manner of its saying, any better than those others. He would tell them that he did not belong to any faction, and should vote only as his conscience led him. Then, if he must stand alone, he would do so.

He hardly knew what he said, yet it was well said. Clayton's training had given him command of language, and his honest indignant feelings and ingenuous nature gave him force and candor. As he spoke the caucus broke into frantic cheering. Men stood in their chairs and yelled like wild Indians, or maniacs. Here Justin was not an Iscariot or an Arnold, but a "patriot" and a "savior." This caucus represented the irrigationists, and Justin's declaration that he would vote only as his conscience dictated assured them that he was not to be controlled by the ranchmen, and that the reports they had received from Paradise Valley concerning him were true.

Escaping from these men Justin returned to his

room, to which Fogg came soon, though Justin was in no mood to receive him. Fogg closed the door softly and dropped somewhat heavily into a chair. His fat face looked worried.

"You don't doubt that I'm your friend, Justin?" he said, cautiously.

"I don't know that I've any right to doubt it; you've always been my friend, heretofore."

"And I'm your friend now—the best friend you've got in this city."

"The only one, I suppose," said Justin, tipping his chair against the wall and looking at Fogg keenly. "I'm a stranger here."

"So I've come to talk this matter over with you. I don't need to go into details—you know how you were elected, by a queer combination of opposing interests. The cowboys who voted for you did it because they like you and dislike Ben Davison, and not because they want you to oppose the ranch interests in the legislature. If they considered the matter at all, which is doubtful, they thought they could trust you not to do anything here that would be to their injury. Likely you think you owe your election to the farmers, but you don't; they supported you, but it was the cowboy vote which elected you.

"I have never questioned that fact," said Justin.

"Perhaps not, but you seem to forget it. Now, there's another thing, of even greater importance, it appears to me, which you ought to take into consideration. The cattlemen are a power in this state. At present they are allied with the party in control

here, and the same party is in control at Washington. You know what that means."

"I should be a fool if I didn't."

"Just so; and understanding the situation, is it the part of wisdom—under all the circumstances now, Justin—is it the part of wisdom for you to oppose that party? The opposition, which is just now making such a noise, is a composite thing bound together with a rope of sand. A half-dozen factions have thrown their influence to the minority party and are making a desperate effort to get control of the legislature. Suppose they succeed this time, where will they be next year, or two or four years from now? They are antagonistic on every question but this, and they will fall apart; nothing else can happen, as you must see yourself. Don't you see that?"

"Yes, I can see that all right."

"Well, then, what is to be gained, in a personal way, by going over to them? I'm not going to argue the thing with you, but just make these statements to set you to thinking."

Fogg knew when he had said enough, and he arose to go.

"What did that paper mean, by attacking me in that way?" Justin asked.

Fogg sat down again.

"Newspaper men are as likely to make fools of themselves as other men. They rushed that edition onto the street as a 'beat,' or 'scoop.' They're sorry they did it already, if they've got as much brains as I think they have."

"Why should it be assumed in the first place that

I intended to ally myself with the cattlemen, and why should the simple statement which I made in that caucus cause me to be branded as a Judas and Benedict Arnold?"

"It was simply an exhibition of what those fellows would call journalistic enterprise, I suppose. They wanted to make a sensation, and sell papers. They even sold a copy to you." Fogg laughed. "You wouldn't have bought that copy, otherwise."

"Well, I wasn't pleased by it. If anything would make me vote against the cattlemen when I thought I ought to vote with them, such attacks as that would."

Fogg laughed again, and ran his fingers over the shining gold chain that lay across his rotund stomach.

"The fellow that stands in the limelight has got to take his medicine, and it's no use kicking. The only way to do is to go straight ahead and take no notice of what the papers say. That's what I try to do, though I admit I get my mad up sometimes over some of the things they print about me. That paper, which poured vitriol on you to-day, will shower you with rosewater and honey to-morrow, if what you do pleases it."

"I shan't try to please it!" Justin declared, angrily.

"No, I wouldn't; I'd try to please myself, and I'd try to look out for Number One. Well, I must be going!" He rose again. "And just think over what I've said to you in friendship. The range will be here, and the cattlemen, when all these other

little barking dogs are dead and forgotten. My word for it, a desire for loot and plunder is really all that holds them together now, though they're making such a howl about public virtue and honesty. I've been in the political whirl before, and I know those men right down to the ground."

He extended his hand as he reached the door, and Justin, having risen also, took it.

"I'm your friend," said Fogg, as a final word, "and what I've said is for your own good."

When he was gone Justin sat down to think it over. He knew there was much truth in Fogg's statements. The conglomerate opposition struggling now to gain control of the legislature would fall to pieces inevitably by and by. If he voted with the ranch interests he would please the cowboys who had worked for his election, he would please Fogg and Davison, and he would not displease Lucy Davison. But would he please himself? Would he please Curtis Clayton? He could not hope by so doing to please the farmers.

Justin had ambition, though he was not consumed by it. He did not wish to wreck his future. Philip Davison, in that memorable interview, had told him to do something, be something, accomplish something. In the interval between that time and now no opportunity had come to him. He had left the ranch, where he could earn only cowboy's wages, though not wholly because of the low wages. He had for a time secured employment in the town, but the position had been neither promising nor permanent. He had been thinking seriously of going to

Denver, to try his fortunes in its larger field, when the fire came which incapacitated him, and after the fire this unexpected election.

He was in Denver now, and he was a member of the legislature. Ambition and a desire to show to Philip Davison that he was not unworthy of his regard and friendship, not unworthy even to become the husband of Lucy Davison, urged him to one course; Clayton's teachings and influence, and his own inner feeling as to what was right and what was not right, was urging him to the opposite course. Should he continue to offend Philip Davison and at the same time wreck his political prospects?

"But what can I do?" was his mental cry, as he struggled with this problem. "I can't vote for things which I know are not right, nor for men I know I can't trust."

Early in the morning he encountered Fogg. The encounter was not by chance, though Fogg pretended that it was.

"I hope you thought over those things carefully?" he inquired, unable to conceal his anxiety.

"I have thought to this point," said Justin; "I will vote with the cattlemen wherever my conscience will let me, but I can't vote for your candidate for United States senator."

Fogg stood aghast.

"That puts you in the camp of the irrigationists, with all that mongrel crew!"

"I can't help it."

Justin's tone was decided. His face was feverish. He had passed a bad night.

"I can't help it, if it does, Fogg. The things that man stands for are not right, and I can't support him."

Fogg detained him, and threshed the old arguments over; he even used the potent argument that Justin ought not to follow deliberately a course that must inevitably injure Philip Davison very much in a financial sense; but, having with deep travail of soul reached that one conclusion, Justin Wingate was now as immovable as a rock.

CHAPTER V

HARKNESS AND THE SEER

HARKNESS and Clayton had come to Denver; Clayton to "hold up the hands" of Justin, guessing what he would be called on to encounter, and Harkness to see the "sights" in this time of political turmoil. The cowboys were virtually in a state of revolt. It was not possible that it could be otherwise. When Harkness, enraged and resentful, led them in that rebellion against Ben Davison, ranch discipline was destroyed and he lost control of them himself. Not that he now cared. The impulse which led him to strike Ben to the earth by the ranch house door had guided him since. He knew that the restraining hand of Fogg, who had present interests to serve, alone checked the wrath of Philip Davison. He, and all the other cowboys, must go, as soon as this thing was settled. Nothing else was possible, when such a man as Philip Davison was to be dealt with.

Harkness met Justin on the street in front of the hotel and made straight for him. It was not a bee-line, for Harkness was comfortably intoxicated. He had the cowboy failing. Though he never touched liquor while on the ranch and duty demanded sobriety, he could not resist the temptation

to drink with a friend or an acquaintance when he was in the city. He greeted Justin with hilarious familiarity, and the scent of the liquor mingling with the scent of cinnamon drops Justin found almost overpowering.

"Shake!" he cried, reeling as he took Justin's hand. "Justin, I'm yer friend! Don't you never fergit it, I'm yer friend! And there ain't no strings on you! Understand—there ain't—no—strings—on—you! We fellers elected you 'cause we like you, and 'cause we couldn't vote for Ben Davison. 'To hell with Ben Davison,' says I to the boys,—'to hell with him; he took my wife's horse and left her and Helen to burn to death in that fire! I'll see him damned 'fore—'fore I'll vote fer him!' And so I would, Justin; an' we—we (hic) voted f'r—fer you, see! We voted fer you. Davison's goin' to d's-charge me an' I know it, but let him. I don't haf to be cowboy, I don't. Let him d'scharge (hic) and damn to him! Let him d'scharge. But you go right ahead an' do as you want to. You're honest, an' you're all right, an' we're backin' you."

When Fogg appeared—he had not yet abandoned hope of Justin—Harkness swayed up to him pugnaciously. He had never liked Fogg, and he liked him less now. Fogg's oiliness sickened the cowboy stomach.

"Fogg," he blustered, "Justin's my friend, see! And there ain't no strings on him. He's honest, an' we're backin' him. You want to hear my sentiments? 'To hell with Ben Davison!' Them's my sentiments, an' I ain't 'shamed of 'em. Davison's

goin' to d'scharge me an' I know it. Le'm d'scharge. Who keers f'r d'scharge? I don't haf to be cowboy, I don't. But you treat Justin right. You've got to treat (hic) treat him right, fer he's my friend, see!"

Fogg protested that he had never contemplated treating Justin in any other way, and that Justin was his good friend as well as Harkness's.

Wandering about Denver that day, "staring like a locoed steer," as he afterward expressed it, Harkness came to a stand in front of a doorway and looked at a man who had emerged therefrom. The man was William Sanders, but he passed on without observing Harkness.

"What's he doin' up here?" Harkness queried, as he watched the familiar figure disappear in the crowd.

Sanders had gone, and to get an answer to his question Harkness stared at the doorway, and the building, a somewhat imposing edifice of brick, situated on one of the principal streets. It was given over to offices of various kinds, he judged; but what fixed his eye was a sign with a painted index-hand pointing to it.

"Madame Manton, Seer, Fortune teller, Palmist, and Clairvoyant. Fortune telling and astrology. The past and the future revealed. Lost articles found, dreams interpreted, lovers re-united."

There was a statement below this, in much smaller letters, setting forth that Madame Manton, who was a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter and from birth gifted with miraculous second-sight, had just returned to America after a prolonged stay in Euro-

pean capitals, during which she had achieved marvellous successes and had been consulted on important matters by the crowned heads.

Harkness did not know whether to connect the egress of William Sanders from that doorway with this fortune teller or not, but the vagaries of his intellectual condition impelled him to enter. Following the direction of the pointing hand, he was soon climbing a stairway which led to the door of this professed mistress of the black arts. Here another sign, with even more emphatic statements, greeted him. On this door Harkness hammered lustily.

"Come in!" said a voice.

Harkness tried the knob with fumbling fingers, then set his massive shoulders to the panel, and was fairly precipitated into the room where a rosy half-light glowed from a red lamp, and the sunlight, showing through heavy red curtains, conjured queer shadows in the corners. At the farther end of the room sat a woman. She was robed in red, and her chair was red. A reddish veil hid her face. But the hand she extended was small and white, and flashed the fire of diamonds.

Harkness was so taken aback that he was almost on the point of bolting from the room. But that would have savored of a lack of courage, and his drink-buoyed mind resented the imputation. He would not run, even from a red fortune teller. Seeing a chair by the door he dropped into it, stared at the woman, and not knowing what else to do took out his red handkerchief to mop his red face. The odor of cinnamon drops floating out from it com-

bined with that of the whiskey and filled the room.

"If you will be kind enough to close the door!" said the woman.

She was looking at him intently. He closed the door, and dropped back into the chair. He crossed his legs nervously, then uncrossed them, wiped his face again with the scented handkerchief, and finally stuck his big hands into his big pockets to get rid of them. He was dressed in half cowboy garb, and it began to dawn on him that he was "cutting a pretty figure," sitting there with that fortune teller.

"I suppose you'd like to have your fortune told?" she questioned.

"I dunno 'bout that!" he protested, his big hands burrowing deep into his pockets. "I seen a feller come from this way, and I kinder p'inted my toes in the same direction. Mebbe you was tellin' his fortune?"

"No one has been here for more than an hour."

"Then I reckon I was mistook. Do you make up these here fortunes out of your own head, or how?"

"I tell whatever is to be told."

"Fer coin?"

"Yes, for coin. Even a fortune teller must live. Put five dollars on that tray beside you and I will begin."

"If you can tag me, I'll make it ten!"

Harkness put a crisp five dollar bill on the tray. If she had said ten he would have placed that there. Liquor made him generous.

"You do not believe in fortunes?"

"Not any, lady. I stumbled into this game, and

I'm simply playin' it fer the fun of it, same's I used to go into a game of cards with Ben Davison, when I knowed good and well he'd skin me. I'm goin' up ag'inst your game, lady, and payin' before the game begins. It's cut out fer me to lose, but I'll double the bet and lose it willin' if you can put your finger on me an' tell me whatever about myself. I don't reckon you can do it."

A low laugh of amusement came from behind the veil.

"You might as well put down the other five dollars now, to save you the trouble of doing it later."

Then she leaned forward and stared at him so intently that he felt almost nervous. There was something uncanny in that rigid stare, and in the strained tones of her voice, when she spoke after prolonged silence. He fancied he could see her glowing eyes through the mesh of the veil.

"Your last name begins with an H. Let me see! It is something like Hearing. No, it can't be that! It's Hark—Hark—Harkening. No, that can't be. I can't get it; but I didn't promise to tell names. There are a great many cattle where you live. Yes, and you are married. That's strange, for not many cowboys are married. You have a little girl."

She put her hand to her head, and was silent a moment.

"That's very queer. The name of your little girl, her first name, begins with an H." She uttered a little inarticulate cry. "And, oh, dear, she seems to be surrounded by fire; flames are on all sides of her, and smoke! And she is frightened."

Harkness started from his chair.

"She ain't in any fire now?"

The woman dropped back with a sigh.

"No, not now," she admitted; "that is past. I am telling you things you know about, so that you will see that I have the power I claim. Some one, some one on horseback, is saving her from that fire."

"And a certain cuss is skedaddlin' without liftin' a finger to help her!" said Harkness grimly. "Put that in the picture, fer I ain't fergittin' it."

The disclosures which followed astonished the intoxicated cowboy. He could not have revealed them more clearly himself. The fortune teller took excursions into the future too, in a way to please him; and, as she could tell the past so well, he was glad to believe in her glittering portrayals of delights to come.

Altogether Harkness was bewildered to the point of stupefaction. He was sure he had never seen this woman nor she him, and her knowledge produced in him a half-frightened sensation. Though he always resolutely denied it to himself and to others, he was deeply superstitious. If he began to sing as soon as he rose in the morning, he tried to dissipate the bad luck that foretold by singing the words backward. If he chanced to observe the new moon for the first time over his left shoulder, he turned round in his tracks three times and looked at it over his right. If he saw a pin on the floor with its point toward him he picked it up, for that was a sign of good luck. And he had such a collection of

cast-off horseshoes he could have started a shoeing shop on short notice.

Harkness was so well satisfied with the fortune teller that when she concluded he dropped the second five dollar bill on the tray.

"You're as welcome to it, lady, as if it was water," he declared. "Five dollars won't count even a little bit when I come into the fortune you p'inted out to me. You're a silver-plated seer from the front counties. You'll find Dicky Carroll jumpin' into this red boodoir the first time he hits Denver. I'll tell him about you, and it 'll set him wild."

Then he plunged down the stairway, fully convinced that he had received the full worth of his money, not at all knowing that he had imparted much more information than he had received.

When he was gone the woman leaned back in her red chair and laughed until the tears came into her eyes. She laid aside the reddish veil, thus revealing the features of Sibyl Dudley, and wiped away the tears with a filmy handkerchief.

Then she began to make an estimate of the value of the information she had received from this intoxicated cowboy, and from William Sanders. It was considerable. She had formed many of her statements so craftily that they were questions, and she had made these men talk about themselves and their affairs in really garrulous fashion.

When a little time had elapsed she ventured into the street, in an entirely different garb and veiled more heavily. Walking across the street she hailed a cab, and was driven home, halting however at a

corner to purchase copies of the latest Denver papers. At home she began to absorb their contents.

Sibyl Dudley's finances were at a low ebb. Mr. Plimpton, the stock broker, had met a reverse of fortune, and criminal proceedings being hinted by men he had fleeced, he had gone into exile. Where he was Sibyl did not know, and if she had known he could not have helped her, for he had now no money. With debts thickening about her, and no new admirer with a plethoric bank account yet appearing, she was being driven to desperate extremities. To tide over this day of evil fortune she had, carefully veiled that no one might know her, become Madame Manton.

All these years she had kept Mary Jasper with her. Her attitude toward Mary may be thought singular. Yet to Sibyl it was entirely natural. She had plucked and worn this fair flower at first that it might add to her attractiveness, as she would have plucked a wild rose to tuck in her corsage on some gay evening when she desired to accentuate her physical attractions in the eyes of men. But the utter simplicity and guilelessness which Mary had worn through all as a protecting armor had touched some hidden spring in this woman's heart, so that she came at last to cherish a brave desire to stand well in the opinion of this pure girl and maintain firmly her position on that pinnacle of supposed goodness and kindness where Mary had established her. Hence her charities were continued by and by, not to create that inner warmth of which she had spoken, but that Mary might believe her to be char-

itable. And if any good angel could have done so great a thing as to pull her from that miry clay in which her feet were set Mary Jasper would, all unconsciously, have accomplished even that. Sibyl Dudley, driven back upon herself, had to have some one who could love and respect her; for in spite of all she was a woman, and love was starving in her heart.

But she was not courageous enough to be honest; and, having read through the papers, she sat thinking and planning how she might win money enough to continue her present fight against adverse circumstances. She could not confess to Mary that she was not rich, that she was a pretender, and vile and degraded. No, she could not do that. But to keep up her pretensions she must have money. Fortune telling was an odious and precarious calling. She was sinking deeper into debt. She must have money.

Putting away the papers and going to her mirror she scanned her appearance. In spite of her strenuous fight, Time had the slow-moving years with him, and they bit into heart and face like acid. She brought forth her rouge and her pencils. They had long worked wonders and her slender fingers had not lost their cunning. She was an artist in paint though she never touched brush to canvas.

When Mary came in Sibyl was singing in a light-hearted way and thrusting bits of cake to her canary between the bars of its gilded cage.

CHAPTER VI

THE MOTH AND THE FLAME

CLAYTON was standing idly in front of his hotel. Sibyl Dudley and Mary Jasper were driving by in the cool bright sunshine of the late afternoon. Sibyl glanced keenly at the well-known figure. Clayton had lost much in trimness and neatness of appearance by his long sojourn in Paradise Valley. His clothing was ill-fitting, and his almost useless left arm appeared to swing more stiffly than ever, as the crowd jostled him. The contrast between the stylishly-dressed woman in the carriage and this man who had once been her husband was marked. Yet the handsome face of the man was still there, almost unseamed, and it revealed kindness and cultured intelligence, as of old.

"It is Doctor Clayton!" she said. "He looks so lonely and is such a stranger here that it will be a kindness if we speak to him. I knew him very well once, you know."

The horses had trotted on, unnoticed by Clayton. Sibyl spoke now to the driver, and the carriage was turned and driven back to the hotel. The old desire to prove her power over this man possessed her. And she might be able to use him!

"Speak to him," she said to Mary. "It will

please him, I'm sure, to meet some one he knows. And it's so long since I met him that he may have forgotten me entirely."

The carriage with the well-groomed horses in their shining harness had drawn up at the curb. Even yet the abstracted doctor had not observed the occupants of the carriage. But now, when Mary addressed him, he looked up, almost startled to hear his name spoken there. He recognized Mary, and his face flushed a deep red when he recognized also the woman who sat smiling beside her.

"It is Doctor Clayton, is it not?" said Sibyl, speaking to him and using her utmost witchery. "It seems so strange to see you away from Paradise Valley. But it is a pleasure."

He came up to the carriage, hesitating for words. He did not trust this woman, yet he could not forget what she had once been to him. And he had always liked Mary, as he liked her crabbed old father. He had justified himself for not speaking to Sloan Jasper, with the thought that he really knew nothing concerning the life that Sibyl was living. When a man cannot justify his actions he loses self-respect, and Clayton had never lost his self-respect. He had known nothing of Sibyl's private life from the moment of his plunge into the world-forgotten valley of Paradise. He knew nothing now. As he looked into her eyes, the trepidation and confusion which had produced that hot flush was mingled with pity and a yearning touch of the old love. She had faded, she was garish, yet she was Sibyl, and to him

still beautiful; Sibyl, whom he had loved and married, and from whom he had fled.

"You are looking well," he said to Mary, though she was not looking well, for trouble with Ben had set shadows in her dark eyes. "And you, too Mrs. ——"

He hesitated.

"Dudley," Sibyl supplemented. "We haven't met for so long that you have actually forgotten my name!" She smiled amiably. "Won't you take a seat with us for a little spin about the streets? This crowd bores you, I know."

He still hesitated, hunting for words. He had never felt so awkward, nor had his clothing ever seemed to set so badly or look so mean. He began to realize that in Paradise Valley he had lost something. Where was the neatly-dressed college student, filled with learning and a desire to please? Apparently only the learning and the desire to please remained. And that desire to please, which often took the form of an inability to displease any one, made it impossible for him to refuse this invitation.

Clayton, entering the carriage, found himself by Sibyl's dexterous manipulation placed in the seat at her side, with Mary in the seat in front of them. He looked at Mary as the carriage started, and he wondered, and his heart smote him. Then he looked at the woman who sat with him.

"She is very happy with me," said Sibyl, as the horses beat their noisy tattoo through the street, deadening the sound of her voice. "And there isn't a better girl in the world!" There was a peculiar

emphasis on the words. "If you thought differently, you have been much mistaken. She has been as safe with me as that boy Justin has been with you; and I love her as much as you can possibly love him. She is a dear, true, simple-hearted girl, and she thinks everything of me. And I am much better than you have ever thought. So don't get silly ideas into your head, simply because you see this carriage and I wear a few diamonds. The carriage may be hired and the diamonds paste. It was one of your dogmas, you know, that people should always hold charitable opinions."

"And I do. I have always thought kindly of you and had charitable opinions of you. One never knows what he would do if put in the position of another. I was hurt, crushed; but I never could have it in my heart to blame you for anything. Sometimes I felt bitter, but even the bitterness has long since worn away."

Mary turned in her seat and began to speak to them, and the conversation was not taken up until Clayton and Sibyl were alone together in her home, to which they were driven after they had traversed a few streets. Sibyl was anxious to get Clayton to herself, and she therefore cut the drive short, complaining of the chill of approaching night.

Mary, fluttering about the rooms, came into the parlor and went out again at intervals. Sibyl had kindly relieved her of the task of entertaining Clayton. Remembering the story of his broken arm, Mary felt a deep sympathy for him, yet she had never been able to converse with him at length. He

was so learned and wise, and at times so strange and silent, that he oppressed her. She revered him, but she could not talk with him. Besides, she had a letter to write to Ben, who was coming to Denver in a day or two, and she wanted to think about Ben and what she should say to him in that letter. The composition of a letter even to Ben was not always an easy thing; and though she still wrote to her father each Sunday, what she said to him was so brief, sometimes, that for all the space required to contain it she might have sprawled it on a postal card.

While Mary thought of Ben and studied for words and sentences before secluding herself to begin the actual work of writing, she gave thought also to Clayton and Sibyl, and was quite sure that Sibyl was kind and charitable in thus seeking to give pleasure to the lonely doctor who had been apparently at a loss in the Denver streets. And then, it came like a flash—what if Clayton should fall in love with Sibyl, and they should marry? It seemed to her that much stranger things had happened. And in contemplating this new and bright suggestion she built up a very pretty little romance, which had a marked resemblance to some of those which Pearl used to read. Romantic ideas fluttered in Mary's pretty head as thickly as butterflies amid Japanese cherry blossoms.

When she began the composition of her letter, dipping her gold pen in the blue ink which Ben liked, Sibyl was at the piano and singing in a way to disturb the flow of her thoughts.

"But she has a beautiful voice!" thought Mary, laying down the pen and listening with admiration. "Wouldn't it be strange if they should take a fancy to each other and marry?"

It appeared entirely possible, now that Mr. Plimpton had departed from Denver.

Sibyl was singing one of the old songs that touched the deep springs of the past, and Clayton with inexpressible yearning was wishing that the years between could drop away and he could be her willing slave again. The love that had been dead, though it came forth now bound about with grave-clothes, lived again, and spoke to his heart a familiar language.

"You remember the song?" she said, looking up into his face and smiling. He had come forward to the piano.

"Yes," he confessed. "I shall never forget it. You sang it the evening you told me you loved me and would be my wife. I wish you had chosen another."

"Why?"

She looked steadily into his eyes, half veiling her own with their dark lashes.

"There is no need to ask," he said, and retreated to his chair. "The change since then is too great. I am not the same, and you are not the same." He glanced at his stiff arm and his ill-fitting clothing. "Nothing can ever be the same again."

She was studying how she might win him, if only temporarily. Certain plans were no longer fluid, and she believed she could use him.

"That doesn't sound like you, Curtis."

"Sibyl," he threw out his stiff arm with a protesting gesture, "I hope you are not trying to play with me, as a cat with a mouse. You know how I have always felt toward you. You know that even after you sold yourself to that man Plimpton, I——"

She commanded silence by putting her fingers to her lips; and tip-toeing to the door she closed it, that Mary might not by any chance hear his unguarded words.

"Even after that I would have taken you back gladly, and could have forgiven you and loved you, for I was always a fool about you. You will pardon me for speaking so plainly? I don't want to hurt your feelings. I went away, as you know, and have tried to find peace by burying myself from the world. And I have found peace, of a certain kind. But I am not the same as I was. I hope I am not as weak as I was."

Yet he knew he had at that moment no more stability than water. If he could have believed any protestation she might make, he would have done so joyfully, and would have gone far to purchase such a belief.

"I have been a great fool in many ways," she admitted. "But I hope not a bigger fool than the man who pitches himself headlong out of the living world into a desert simply because he and his wife have agreed to a separation. But as you say, all that is past, and there is no need to talk about it. Now I want to forget it and be your friend, if I can't be anything else."

"What else would you be?"

He spoke in a hoarse voice.

"At present, just your friend. You need a friend, and I need one. We have been enemies a good while. Let us forget that, and be friends again."

"Mere friendship with you would never satisfy me, Sibyl. You know that as well as I do. Unless I could be your husband, and hold you heart-true to me as my wife, I could never be anything to you."

Though shaken by his emotions he spoke with unusual determination. Thoughts of Plimpton aroused whatever militant manhood there was in him. For the instant he felt that he ought to have killed Plimpton, and that his flight had been the flight of a coward. Sibyl saw that she was approaching him from the wrong side.

"Yet mere friendship, as you call it, is a good thing. The friendship between Mary and myself, for instance, and that between you and Justin—you will not say they are worthless. You even came up to Denver, I think, to see Justin, because you could not bear to be separated long from him.

He looked at her earnestly, with a mental question.

"Don't put your hands on him!"

"Don't be a fool!" she said. "Why should I? But I won't beg for the favor of your friendship. I thought we might be friends, good friends. You could establish yourself here in the city, and we could see each other occasionally, if nothing else. I am a better woman than I used to be, a very much better woman than you will believe me to be. Mary has

done that for me. And I suppose you thought I would ruin her? That shows that you never understood me."

"I couldn't stay here in Denver!" he protested.

"We might be even more than friends, some time," she urged sweetly.

"Sibyl," he seemed about to rise from his chair, but sank back, "if I could believe you!"

Her words, which he knew to be lies, were still sweet. His heart was filled with unutterable longing, not for "the touch of a vanished hand," but for a vanished past.

"I will be your friend," he said earnestly, after a moment. "I have never been anything else, except when I was your devoted lover and foolish husband. I should like to be both again, if I could."

"Even that might be. There is such a thing as forgetting, you know."

"Not for me."

"Then a forgiving."

"Yes. Until to-night I thought I had forgiven, and I was trying to forget. I shall be glad to be your friend, Sibyl. As to establishing myself in Denver, to be near you, I will think about it. If—if there were no such thing as memory, we might still be very happy."

His under-current of common sense told him that he had again entered a fool's paradise.

"We can be happy, Curtis. You shall not leave Denver. I need more than your friendship. I need your love. I tossed it away, but I didn't know what I was doing. I need your love, and I know you will

not refuse it. You never refused me anything; whatever I asked, you gave me."

He had already given her his life!

In his room at the hotel that night Clayton packed and unpacked his valise, in a state of delirious uncertainty. In the mirror he beheld his face, ghastly as that of a dead man. But, slowly, his philosophy came to his aid.

"Lies, and I know it! And I am a coward! The thing for me to do is to get back into the wilderness."

The next morning he was gone. The letter which came shortly urged Justin, in a shaky hand, to stand for principle, no matter what happened, and explained that the writer felt that he must hurry home.

CHAPTER VII

THE COMPACT

LEMUEL FOGG was very much astonished when he received a call from Sibyl Dudley, who invaded the privacy of his room without taking the trouble to announce her coming. Fogg did not know much about Mrs. Dudley, except that she was a friend and patron of Sloan Jasper's pretty daughter, and lived in Denver. He had once remarked to an acquaintance, as she passed, that she was "a stunning woman." And he was not ready to withdraw that opinion now, when he saw her before him. Having sallied forth to conquer, she had not neglected anything that would add to her attractiveness in masculine eyes.

It did not take Sibyl long to acquaint Fogg with the nature of her errand. She was tactfully frank, for she knew how to reach such a man.

"Mr. Fogg, I'm horribly in debt," she announced, looking him in the face without the quiver of an eyelash. "I must have money, five thousand dollars, to be paid to me if I prevent Justin Wingate from giving his vote to the man the irrigationists want for United States senator."

He stared at her. How handsome she was! And what nerve she displayed! Not one woman in a

thousand would have made such a confession, or come at him in that manner. Her idea appealed to him, if there was anything in it.

"Why, what can you do?" he asked. He smoothed his limp mustache, and wondered if his collar set just right; he knew he had forgotten to turn his reversible cuffs that morning! "What can you do, Mrs. Dudley? Everything has been done that can be done already. I've begged him, argued with him, prayed with him; and every man on our side who is supposed to have the least influence with him has done the same thing. We have even threatened him. Promises, threats, bribes, nothing will move him."

Sibyl smiled at him across the little table. She had beautiful teeth.

"It can be done," she said, with sweet conviction.

So singular and confident was her expression that he was almost tempted to look into her ungloved right hand to see if she clasped a poniard. He saw only the flash of her rings.

"Why, what would you do;" he cried, in sudden amazement; "knife him?"

She gave him a glance of scorn, which melted at once into a captivating smile.

"How absurd you are! Who ever dreamed of such a thing? This isn't the Back of Beyond."

"What would you do?"

"Is it worth five thousand dollars to you if Justin Wingate does not vote against the cattlemen's candidate for senator?"

He regarded her thoughtfully, and jingled the watch chain that lay across his round stomach.

"Yes," he admitted, "it's worth every cent of it."

"Will you agree to pay me that sum if I do keep him from casting that vote? I am in debt and must have money; five thousand dollars is little enough; but if you will satisfy me that you will give me that much money I will prevent that vote."

"Tell me how you're going to do it."

"If I told you I should render my services valueless. You will have to trust everything to me."

"You want me to sign a note, or promise; I couldn't do that. It wouldn't be good politics."

"Then you will have to pay me something in advance. I must be secured in some manner."

Lemuel Fogg had never yet bought a pig in a poke, and he did not intend to begin that doubtful practice now. He questioned Sibyl Dudley's ability to do what she said. She was a very charming woman; he admired her very much; but beautiful women had never the power to make Lemuel Fogg cut his purse-strings. So he refused, very tactfully and graciously, as becomes a man who has to refuse anything to a pretty woman. She saw that it was a refusal, and final.

"What will you do, then?" she asked. "If Justin casts that vote you lose your senator. I can keep him from casting it."

"If you will be quite frank with me, we'll get on faster, Mrs. Dudley," Fogg urged. "You could perhaps tell me something of your plans; I don't ask

to know too much. But five thousand dollars is a big sum of money."

"It's a small sum, Mr. Fogg, for what I propose to do. You don't believe I can prevent Justin from voting against your man. I can see you don't."

"Well, I'll say this much—nobody else could! Everything has been tried that could be thought of. The fellow is a fool, and it's impossible to reason with a fool."

"Justin is anything but a fool, but he has an uncomfortable lot of queer notions. I think he must have obtained them from that doctor he has been living with down in Paradise Valley. I chance to know something of the character of Doctor Clayton; and while he is, I suppose, one of the best men in the world, so far as pure goodness goes, he is as foolish and illogical as a cat, or a woman."

"Yet you are a woman!"

Fogg was beginning to be comfortable again. He would not have to advance money to Mrs. Dudley, and having safely weathered that dangerous cape he felt better.

"All women are not cats or fools. For instance, I am not so foolish as not to know the value of money, and the value of the ability I happen to have. You say you won't advance me anything; what will you do?"

Fogg looked at her and jingled his watch chain.

"Mrs. Dudley, I'm willing to be as generous as you can expect, conditionally. If that money should be paid I'd have to take a big part of it out of my own pocket. The rest I could probably raise among

my friends. I will promise you, as faithfully as a promise can be made that is not put in writing, that if by any means you can induce or force Justin Wingate to vote for our man for United States senator, or even to withhold his vote from the opposition, you shall have the five thousand dollars you named. We could win with his vote, and if he refused to vote at all I think we still could win. Will that promise do?"

"Five thousand dollars is not enough, if I am to have no money in advance. I shall charge you interest; a thousand dollars as interest." She laughed lightly. "Give me your promise that if Justin refuses to cast his vote for United States senator, or votes for your man, I may draw on you for six thousand dollars through any bank if you do not pay the money at once, and I will demonstrate my ability to control him. Six thousand dollars if I succeed, and not a cent if I fail. That is fair."

Fogg twisted uneasily in his chair, which was almost too small for his big body.

"You're trying to drive a hard bargain. Remember that I shall probably have to pay the most of that money myself, if you succeed."

"If you're as shrewd as I think you are you will not have to pay a cent of it; you can twist it out of men who are interested in this matter. I feel sure that your candidate for senator, together with his friends and the cattlemen, would raise ten thousand dollars, and not say a word against it, if this thing could be guaranteed. I've studied the papers, Mr. Fogg."

She laughed again lightly.

"Yes, if it could be guaranteed."

"This is the same; the money can be raised conditionally; you can get it together in some bank, with the understanding that it is to be returned to those who contribute, every cent, if the thing is not accomplished. And another thing, Mr. Fogg; it will be as well not to mention my name in the matter. Political secrets must be kept close, when so many newspaper men are around. If Justin should once get the idea into his head that a deliberate attempt is being made to control him everything would be lost."

"Yes, I agree with you there." He put his fat hands on the arms of his chair and settled back heavily. He was running over the list of men from whom money might be secured. "And I think I can raise the money, if necessary. Six thousand dollars to you if Justin Wingate does not vote, or votes for our man; and you can draw on me for it the day after a United States senator is elected, if I fail to pay it. It's a bargain; and I hope I shall have to pay it."

"You will have to pay it. Pardon me if I say to you that I didn't come here on a fool's errand. I have your promise, and I shall consider it as binding as a note."

She arose, still looking at him. For a moment she hesitated, then put out her ungloved hand. He had scrambled out of his chair, and he took the hand, giving it a warm pressure.

"Mr. Fogg, now that we know each other, we

can help each other!" She fixed her clear dark eyes upon his. On her upturned face he observed a single rouge spot, hastily applied, but it did not trouble him; his thought was that she was very beautiful. The touch of her warm hand tingled in his large one. "And I hope," she hesitated in a most attractive manner, "that we can be very good friends!"

"I should like to, Mrs. Dudley, I should like to; and I'll get you that money. You needn't be afraid that I'll fail in that. You shall have the whole of it, if I have to pay it myself. I'm very glad that you came to see me in this manner, privately. You're a woman to know."

He laughed coarsely.

But when she was gone, when her personality no longer enthralled, and he sat down to think of her visit in cold blood, Lemuel Fogg began to feel that it might not be a good thing for his bank account if he knew Mrs. Dudley too intimately.

"But I'm glad she came," he thought, as he settled back in his chair, put his feet on the table for comfort, and struck a match to light his cigar; "we must have that vote; or at least we must get it away from the opposition, if it can be done. I'll begin a hustle for that money to-morrow. But I wonder how she expects to control him? By smiling on him, as she did on me?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE THRALL OF THE PAST

SIBYL DUDLEY searched for both Curtis Clayton and William Sanders. When she could not find them, she reasoned that they had gone back to Paradise Valley, and sent them letters urging them to return to Denver. Ben had arrived, and after a talk with Sibyl, and another with Mary, he had induced Mary to send a pressing invitation to Lucy Davison to visit her for a few days.

Meanwhile, Justin was trying to find himself. The violence and virulence of party and factional feeling astonished him. He had not known that men could be so rabid and unreasonable. He was as bewildered by the discovery, and by the furious assaults made on him by men and newspapers, as he had been by the surprising fact of his election. He could not have been assailed more vindictively if he had been a criminal. To hold an honest opinion honestly seemed to be considered a crime by those whom it antagonized.

Candor had ever been impressed on him as a cardinal virtue. It brought a shock to discover that it was anything but a virtue in this political world to which he was so new. Concealment, duplicity, the

accomplishment of a purpose by fair means or foul, these seemed to be the things that had value. It was true that a certain faction in Denver agreed with him, but the agreement was for pecuniary and material reasons. He could see that if their interests lay in the other direction they would oppose him as heartily. Even these men could not keep from pointing out to him how much he was to gain. They thought to stiffen his courage by assuring him that he was on the side that must win. As if that would move him now! No man seemed able to understand that the opinions he held and expressed had no root in a desire to advance himself or enrich himself.

With these discoveries came a temporary weakening of his faith. He was no Sir Oracle, and had never pretended to be, and he began to doubt himself and his conclusions. He wanted to do right, but what was right? Was it an abstraction, after all? He had never before questioned the certainty of those inner feelings on which he had always relied for guidance. Was conscience but a thing of education? A man had told him so but the day before.

As there was no help outwardly he had to burrow for it inwardly. The stimulating wine of memory lay inward, and he drew on it for strength, recalling those hours and even days of quiet thought and talk with Clayton which followed the election. Before him in all its pristine beauty rose that dream of Peter Wingate, that the desert, by which Wingate meant Paradise Valley, should blossom as the rose. Wingate's hopeful and prophetic sermons had made

a deep impression on the plastic mind of the boy who heard them. Though Justin scarcely knew it, that dream of a redeemed desert, working slowly through the years, had become his own. It had long been merely a vague desire, holding at first the form given to it by the minister, that settlers might come in and till the land. But Justin had long since seen that if settlers came in, they must go out again if water was not to be had, and that irrigation alone possessed the transforming power which could make the dream a reality.

The farmers now in Paradise Valley were irrigating as well as they could. They had little money and their devices were of a make-shift character. Yet wherever they could induce water to flow the desert bloomed. Justin had come to sympathize with them in their struggle against adverse conditions the more perhaps because he had so long held that guilty knowledge of the fact that Ben Davison had cut their dam.

In thus surveying the field before him and choosing between the cattlemen and the irrigationists, as they were represented in the valley of Paradise, which was the only world he knew well, Justin had a growing comprehension of that large truth, that if he who makes two blades of grass to grow where but one grew before is a benefactor, a still greater one is the man who changes a cattle range, where ten acres will hardly support a cow, to an irrigated land where five acres will sustain a home. This was the thing indefinitely and faultily foreshadowed in Peter Wingate's dream.

The conditions in Paradise Valley were duplicated in many places throughout the state. Should the struggling farmers give way to the cattlemen, or should they be assisted? If the farmers held the irrigable lands there would be plenty of range left; for there were millions of acres which could never be touched by water, where cattle could graze undisturbing and undisturbed. But the cattlemen coveted the rich valleys where water could be secured without the expense of pumps and windmills, as well as the dry, bunch-grass uplands.

To hold the land they now occupied but did not own, they had allied themselves with the political party which promised a senator whose influence at Washington should favor them. If the agriculturalists won, the illegal fences stretched on every league of grazing land would have to come down, and that would be a serious if not fatal blow to the ranch industry as it was then conducted. Already there were threats and warnings from Washington.

All this Justin included in his wide survey of the conditions which confronted him. A poll of the votes to be cast had shown that he held in his hand the deciding ballot. If he gave it to the cattlemen their candidate for United States senator would be elected, and would use his influence to keep the government from interfering with the illegal fences; the farmers would have to continue their unequal struggle, and perhaps would be forced ultimately out of the country; present ranch conditions would be maintained, and each winter would witness a recurrence, in a greater or less degree, of that terrible

tragedy of the unsheltered range, where helpless animals perished by hundreds in the pitiless storms.

Influenced by Clayton and by the circumstances and incidents of his ranch life, Justin could not help feeling that the open range stood for barbarous cruelty, and agriculture for the reverse. He was the thrall of the past. As often as that memory of the unsheltered range came back to him, and out of the swirling snows starving and freezing cattle looked at him with hungry eyes, while his ears caught their low moanings mingled with the death song of the icy wind, he felt that his intuitions were right, and his doubts fled away.

Then would come the conviction that he had been led, until he stood where he was now. Was it not a strange thing, he reflected at such times, that he, who as a boy had sickened at the branding of a calf, who later had suffered heart-ache with Clayton over the tragedies of the range, who from the first had sympathized with the farmers even as Wingate had sympathized with them, should stand where he stood now? In his hand lay great issues. If he proved true, he would become, without design or volition on his part, the sword of the irrigationists. The question which he faced was whether or not he should be true to that dream of a blossoming desert and to the teachings of Clayton.

Harkness had assured him, with much vehemence, that there were "no strings on him;" the cowboys had given him their votes because they desired to testify thus to their admiration of his bravery and their detestation of the conduct of Ben Davison.

Yet Justin knew there were "strings on him,"—influences, friendships, feelings, hopes and desires, which he could neither forget nor ignore. No longing for place or power could have moved him now that he had taken his stand, and anything approaching the nature of a bribe would have filled him with indignation. But these other things bade him pause and consider; they even forced him to doubt. And with Justin, doubt weakened the very foundations of the structure of belief which at first he had thought so stable.

CHAPTER IX

SANDERS TELLS HIS STORY

THE evening before the day set for the election of United States senator Lemuel Fogg received this message from Sibyl Dudley:

"Remember our agreement. I am prepared to do what I promised. I shall not fail, and you must not."

At a late hour that same evening a messenger handed Justin a note. It was from Sibyl. She was waiting for him in the lobby, and had a carriage in the street.

"I want to take you home with me," she said, in her pleasantest manner.

"Is Lucy there?" was his eager question.

"What a mind reader you are!" She laughed playfully. "She is there, and if you are good I will permit you to have a look at her."

She led the way to the carriage.

"You may see her, after you have seen some one else who is there," she supplemented, as the carriage moved away from the hotel.

"Who may that be?"

Justin did not desire to see any one else.

"Wait!" she said, mysteriously.

Justin thought of Mary, of Ben, and even of

Doctor Clayton But he thought most of Lucy. But for his desire to see Lucy he would not have gone with Mrs. Dudley.

When he arrived and was shown into the parlor he beheld William Sanders. He could not believe that he had been summoned to meet Sanders, and glanced about the room to ascertain if it held any one else. Sanders was alone. Sibyl, following hard on Justin's heels, came in while he was greeting Sanders. The latter, having risen to take Justin's hand, moved his jaws nervously. At home he would have chewed a grass blade or a broom straw. His cunning little eyes glanced away from Justin's, instead of meeting them squarely.

"I have come upon the strangest piece of information!" said Sibyl, speaking to Justin with simulated sympathy. "I could have brought you the news, or told you about it as we drove up, but I wanted you to hear it from Mr. Sanders himself. It is really the strangest and most romantic thing I ever listened to. I simply couldn't believe it when Mr. Sanders told it to me first, but when he explained fully I saw that it must be true."

"And it come about in a mighty curious way; that is, my bein' hyer did. 'Twas through a fortune teller. I've gone to a good many of 'em in my time, but this was the best one I ever found."

Sanders had dropped back into his chair, where he sat limply, his loose shabby garments contrasting strangely with the furnishings of the room. He clicked his teeth together, with a chewing motion, when he was not speaking, and looked at Justin with

shifting gaze. He was not easy in his unfamiliar surroundings, and his manner showed it. Now and then he glanced at Sibyl, as if for help, as he proceeded with his narrative.

"I ain't been feelin' jist right toward Philip Davison, as you know, and you an' me had some trouble onc't; but you know I voted fer ye, er I reckon you know it. Anyway, I did. Well, I come up to Denver not long ago, and this fortune teller I spoke of told me all about that trouble I had with Davison, and about how I was put out that time by you, and everything. She was a clairvoy'nt; went into a trance an' seen the whole thing, and a lot more that I can't tell you now, and when she come out of the trance we had a long talk and she give me some good advice. Charged me two dollars, but it was worth ten, and I'd 'a' paid that ruther than missed it. And when Mrs. Dudley called on her——"

Sibyl affected a very clever confusion.

"I suppose you will think me very foolish, Mr. Wingate, and we women are foolish! I have always refused to believe in fortune tellers, but a friend of mine who had visited this one heard such strange things that——"

"That she went, too," said Sanders, with an expression of gratification, "and I reckon she'll be believin' in fortune tellin' from this on."

"Well, it was very strange," Sibyl admitted with apparent hesitation. "The things she told me caused me to write to Mr. Sanders, and now he is here to tell you what he knows."

"And it's a sing'lar story. And not so sing'lar

either, when you look it up one side and down t'other. I'd 'a' told you all about it long ago, but fer certain things that took place."

Justin, thinking of Lucy and disappointed at not seeing her immediately, had not listened with much attention at first, but now he was becoming interested. It began to dawn on him that this story concerned him. So he looked at Sanders more attentively, with a glance now and then at Sibyl Dudley. He had never admired Mrs. Dudley and he did not admire her now; recalling the things he knew and the things he guessed about her and Clayton, he almost felt at times that he hated her. She was a handsome woman, but even his ignorance discounted the assumed value of rouge and fine raiment. He wondered some times that Clayton could ever have cared for her. He was sure he never could have done so; for, compared with Sibyl, Lucy Davison was as a modest violet to a flaunting tiger lily.

"I set out to ask Doc Clayton some questions about you, the first time I come to his house. You'll remember that time, fer me and Fogg come together. But Clayton made me mad, when he told me that lie about his crooked arm; instid of answerin' me, he made fun of me, and I went away without sayin' anything."

He chewed energetically on this old memory.

"I didn't come back fer a good while after that, you'll reck'lect; I got land at Sumner, an' farmed there a spell. Finally I sold out, an' thought I'd take another look at Paradise Valley. I'd been thinkin' about it all that time, and allowin' I'd go back when

I got ready. I might have writ to you, but I wasn't any hand to write in them days; and I hadn't got over bein' mad at Doc Clayton."

Sibyl, turning her rings on her shapely fingers, was anxious that he should reach the real point, but she withheld any manifestation of impatience. In the school of experience she had learned to wait. Justin was also anxious, and he had not learned so well how to conceal it. But Sanders went on unheeding, stopping now and then to masticate a fact before proceeding further.

"When I come back, intendin' to tell you all I knowed, which I'd begun to feel was due ye, I got into that quarrel with Davison about the fence before I could; and then you and me had that trouble. After that I wouldn't tell; and I wouldn't tell it now but fer certain things. But I reckon you'd ought to know. I dunno whether you'll be pleased er not when you do know; but I'm calculatin' that Davison won't be pleased, and that suits me. I don't make any bones of sayin' that I don't like Davison; but Davison is your paw!"

After all this slow preliminary, the revelation came like a shot from a rifle. Not realizing this, Sanders twisted round in his chair and began to draw from his hip pocket a grimy memorandum book of ancient appearance. Justin was too astonished to speak. He could hardly believe that he had heard aright, and he was prepared to dispute the assertion, for it seemed incredible.

"Do you mean that Mr. Davison is my father?" he cried.

"That's jist what I mean!"

Sanders chewed again, and putting the memorandum book on his knee opened it carefully. Sibyl Dudley, though she had seen the book before, came forward softly from her chair to look. Her dark eyes had kindled. Justin stared at Sanders and the book. The shock of astonishment was still on him. He did not know what to think or say. Sanders appeared the least concerned of all.

"That's jist what I mean, and hyer's the little book in which your mother writ down the things I know about it; you can see it yerself, and you needn't believe me. You was brought to that preacher, Mr. Wingate, by me, and left there. I took you and your mother into my wagon. She was too sick to walk even, and she died in it; and then, not knowin' what to do with you, fer you was jist a baby, and I was only a kid myself, I took you to the preacher. I had left this mem'randum book behind, through a mistake; but I give him the Bible, and some other things, and calc'lated to bring this to him. But I didn't right away, and then I lost track of him."

Justin was trembling now. Though still unable to grasp the full meaning of this revelation, he saw that Sanders was recounting things he knew. There was no deception. He took the book in his shaking hands, when Sanders passed it to him. It was grimy and disreputable in appearance, but if Sander's story were true it had been hallowed by his mother's touch.

"When I heard the name of Wingate the first time that I come to the valley and stopped all night

at Clayton's I was goin' to ask him all about you and tell him what I knowed; but he made me mad, when he cut me off that way, and I didn't. 'Tain't no good excuse fer not tellin', I reckon, an' you may think I hadn't any better excuse later on, but that's why I didn't, anyway. Davison's treatin' me the way he did and that trouble I had with you made me keep my head shet till now. But that fortune teller, when I seen her the second time, said fer me to tell you the whole thing, and so I'm doin' it, though mebbe it won't please you."

Sander's tone was apologetic.

Justin heard in amazed bewilderment. Philip Davison his father! The thing was incredible, impossible. But he opened the memorandum book with reverent fingers, as Sanders wandered on with his explanations and excuses. This little diary at least was real. The first glance showed him the familiar handwriting which he knew to be his mother's. He knew every curve and turn of the letters penned in the little Bible, which at that moment was in his trunk at the hotel. There she had written:

"Justin, my baby boy, is now six months old. May God bless and preserve him and may he become a good man."

Here was the same handwriting, a portion of it in pencil so worn in places as to be almost illegible. Hardly hearing what Sanders was now saying Justin began to read. The dates were far apart. Some of the things set down had been written before Justin was born; others must have been penciled shortly

before her death. Many were unrelated and told of trivial things. Others concerned her husband and her child. The details were more complete in the later pencilled notes, where she had sought to make a record for the benefit of her boy in the event of her death, which she seemed to foresee or fear. There was sadness here and tears and the story of a pitiful tragedy; and here also in full were the names of her husband and her son.

She was the wife of Philip Davison, and her son Justin was born a year after her marriage. Davison was then a small farmer, with a few cattle, living in a certain valley, which she named. Davison, as Justin knew, had come from that valley to the valley of Paradise. Davison's habit of occasional intoxication was known to her before her marriage, as was also his violent outbursts of temper; but love had told her the old lie, that she could save him from himself. The result had been disaster. In a fit of drunken rage he had so abused her that she had fled from him in the night with her child. A terrible storm arose as she wandered through the foothills. But she had stumbled on, crazed by fear and more dead than alive. How she lived through the week that followed she declared in this yellowed writing that she did not know, but she had lived. She was journeying toward the distant railroad. Now and then some kind-hearted man gave her a seat in his wagon, and now and then she found shelter and food in the home of some lonely settler. She would not return to Davison, and she hoped he believed she had died in the storm.

The brief record ended in a blank, which had never been filled. Sanders—his name was not mentioned by her—had taken her into his prairie schooner—he was but a fatherless boy himself—and there she had died, worn out by suffering and exhaustion. But her baby had lived, and was now known as Justin Wingate.

A deep sense of indignation burned in Justin's breast against Philip Davison, as he read the pathetic story. Against Sanders he could not be indignant, in spite of the wrong the man had done him by withholding this information through all the years; for Sanders had soothed the last moments of his mother, and Sanders' wagon had given her the last shelter she had known. Justin's fingers shook, and in his eyes there was a blinding dash of tears.

Sanders was still drawling on, stopping occasionally to chew at an unwilling sentence. It was an old story to him, and so had lost interest. Sibyl was standing expectantly by, watching Justin with solicitude for her plans. His feelings did not reach her.

"So I am Philip Davison's son!"

Justin drew a long breath. His voice was choked and the words sounded hoarse and strange.

"I reckon I ought to 'a' told you a good while ago," Sanders apologized; "but I kinder felt that it would please Davison, and after that trouble you an' me had I didn't want to tell it; and, so, I didn't."

His cunning gray eyes shone vindictively.

"I don't mind sayin' to you that I wouldn't turn my hand over to save Davison from the pit, if he is your father; he didn't do right by me, an' you

didn't do right by me. It won't please him to know that you're his son, fer you're fightin' him teeth an' nail; and so I'm willin' to tell it now."

Sanders' ulterior motive was exposed. First and last hatred of Philip Davison and of Justin had guided him.

"It must be a pleasure to you to know who your father really is," said Sibyl, sweetly.

Justin regarded her steadily, without actually seeing her. His faculties were turned inward.

"Yes, that is true; I am glad to know who my father is. I have wondered about it many times. But I never dreamed it could be Mr. Davison. It doesn't seem possible now."

Yet in his hands he held the unimpeachable record.

Sanders rose, shuffling and awkward.

"I'll turn the mem'randum over to you; I reckon it belongs by rights more to you than to Davison, and I don't keer even to speak to him; he's never done right by me."

Justin aroused as Sanders moved toward the door.

"Sanders," he said, "I'm obliged to you for this. I recognize this as my mother's handwriting. You ought to have given it to me long ago, but I'm glad to get it now. And I thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you did for her. I shall never forget it."

"Oh, 'twasn't nothin' at all," Sanders declared, glad to escape the denunciation he had feared.

"And I want you to tell me more about my mother," Justin urged; "what she said when she came to you, and how she looked, and everything."

Sanders sat down again, chewing the quid of reflection, and gave the details Justin demanded, for they had held well in his tenacious memory. Justin, listening with breathless interest, asked many questions, while Sibyl sat by in silent attention and studied his strong beardless face. He thanked Sanders again, when the story was ended.

Sanders appeared anxious to depart, now that he had performed his mission, and Sibyl was glad to have him go. Justin remained in the room. He was thinking of Lucy and desired to see her.

"When I got on the track of that story and understood what it meant, I felt it to be my duty to bring you and Mr. Sanders together and let you hear it from his own lips," said Sibyl, regarding Justin attentively. "And I told him to be sure to bring that diary, for I knew you would want to see it and would prize it highly."

It was in Justin's pocket, but he took it out again, still handling it reverently.

"I thank you for that, Mrs. Dudley," he said with deep sincerity. "The whole thing is so new, so unexpected, that I am not yet able to adjust myself to it; but it was a kindness on your part, and this book I shall hold beyond price."

He studied again the yellowed writing.

"It is beyond price, for my mother wrote it!"

He put the book away and looked at Sibyl.

"The way I chanced to hear of the story was very queer," Sibyl explained. "And the way it has turned out justifies the superstitious spasm which took me to that fortune teller. Sanders was coming

out of her room as I went in. I had seen him in Paradise Valley, and so recognized him, though he did not notice me. When I passed in I spoke to the woman about him, telling her that I knew him; and then she gave me the story she had drawn from him, or which in a confidential moment he had told her. I saw the value of it to you, if true. I had an interview with him for the purpose of verifying it; and then I arranged this meeting, for I thought you ought to receive it straight from him."

Justin thanked her again.

"I think I should like to see Lucy now," he said, "if you have no objection."

Sibyl seemed embarrassed, as she answered:

"I'm sorry to have to say that the servants inform me that she has gone out with Mary to spend the night with a friend in another part of the city. I thought she would be here, and I was sure you would want to have a talk with her after that."

Justin was disappointed.

"I might as well be going then. It is late; too late I suppose to call on her at the place where she is stopping. I will see her to-morrow evening."

He got out of his chair unsteadily. His emotions had been touched so strongly that he felt exhausted, though he had not realized it until he arose. Then he took his hat and went out, after again thanking Sibyl for her kindness.

CHAPTER X

IN THE CRUCIBLE

IN his room at the hotel, Justin re-read that little memorandum book many times that night, and tried to accommodate his mind to its new environment. It was a difficult task. But at last the harshness he had felt toward Philip Davison went out of his soul. By degrees the submerged longing for a father's love began to make itself felt. Philip Davison was his father; he did not doubt it now, though it seemed so strange. He had known from Ben and Lucy that Philip Davison had married twice. Ben was the child of the first marriage, and he the child of the second; and Ben was his half brother!

He saw resemblances now that he had never thought of. Looking at his reflection in the mirror, he beheld blue eyes like those of Philip Davison. The forehead, the nose, the length of body and limb, were all, when thus studied, reminders of Philip Davison. Davison was florid of face, and Justin would probably be florid of face when he grew older, for his complexion was now of that type. Davison's face was seamed with the marks of petulance and many outbursts of bad temper. Justin did not see any of those marks in his own smooth youthful

countenance, but he knew that if he gave way to the fits of rage that swept over him at times with almost uncontrollable force, similar marks might set there the seal of their disapproval.

He was sure, however, that in many ways he was not like Philip Davison, even though he had as a boy so admired Davison; and he was glad to believe that these better traits he inherited from his mother. Though he did not know it, from his mother he had inherited the iron will which was manifesting itself. It had manifested itself in her when she refused to turn back to the home from which she had fled, but traveled on, weak and faint, until death claimed her. Her body had broken, but her will had stood firm to the last; and it had shown itself up to the end in her resolute manner of putting down in that little book her story for the benefit of the child she hoped would live after she had failed and passed on. To Ben, the child of the first marriage, had descended Philip Davison's weaknesses and from his mother had come the slight stature and the pale face. Except in his mental characteristics Ben resembled his father less than Justin did.

Justin did not sleep that night. He knew that Philip Davison was in town, and he began to long to see him. This desire rose by and by as a swelling tide, bearing with it the years' suppressed longing for a father's love. As a child Justin had felt that inexpressible longing. It had moved within him when Clayton came first to the preacher's house and he had pressed closely against Clayton's unresponsive knees while exhibiting the little Bible in which

his mother had written. Clayton had afterward satisfied that longing in a measure; but only the knowledge that the touch of the hand laid on him was really the touch of the hand of his own father could ever satisfy it fully.

So, through the years, that desire had yearned. Justin felt it again now, deeper than hunger, more anguishing than thirst. And it was not lessened by the feeling that Philip Davison might not wish to satisfy it, and perhaps could not. For circumstances stood now like a wall between this father and son; circumstances which were not the choice of either, any more than were the intuitions and the motives, selfish or otherwise, which led them. They had traveled by different paths, and they stood apart. Nevertheless, the yearning was there, deep, pathetic, and it seemed that it would never be appeased. Justin forgot that white indignation that at first had burned with furnace heat against Philip Davison. Love took its place. Philip Davison was his father!

As this desire gained in strength Justin made an effort to see his father. He decided that he would put that little diary into his father's hands and be guided by the result. He surely could trust the better impulses of his own father! But he failed to find Davison. Fogg was absent, probably in attendance upon some all-night caucus, and Fogg was the only man likely to know where Davison could be found.

In the morning Justin discovered that Davison was temporarily absent, possibly out of town, but was expected at any moment. Fogg told him this,

and observed that Justin showed a flushed, anxious face and had passed a sleepless night. Thereupon, remembering the promise of Sibyl Dudley, Fogg's courage rose. He dared not question Justin, and Justin was non-committal. This new knowledge Justin wished to share first of all with his father.

In his room a brief note was brought to him. Lucy Davison was in the ladies' parlor, and he went down to see her. She was seated by one of the windows that overlooked the noisy street. When she arose to meet him he saw that Sibyl had told her everything. There was sympathy and glad happiness, mingled with anxiety, in her manner. Her emotions tinted her cheeks and shadowed her brown eyes. Being a man, Justin did not note how she was dressed, except that it was very becomingly. Being a woman, she not only knew that she was entirely presentable herself, but saw every detail of his garb, from his well-polished shoes to the set of his collar. And she knew that he was clean and handsome. He had never questioned that she was the most beautiful woman, as to him she had been the most beautiful girl, in the world. Mary Jasper's rose-leaf complexion and midnight hair were juvenile and inane beside the glory of Lucy Davison's maturing womanhood.

"I am so glad, Justin, for you!" she said, and gave him her hands without reserve.

"And I am glad!" His voice choked, as he led her back to the window, where the rumble of the street noises stilled other sounds. "I am glad;

though at first I couldn't believe it, for it seemed so improbable. But I'm sure now it is true."

She looked at him with fond admiration; at the straight firm features, at the handsome head with its crown of dark hair, at the tall muscular form, and into the clear blue eyes. And the blue eyes looked into the brown with love in their glance.

"And you're almost related to me," she said, sympathetically, "for you're Ben's half-brother!"

He smiled at her, and tried to assume a cheerful, even a jovial tone.

"I had thought of that, and of what a good thing it is that we're not wholly related!"

"Let me see! What is our relationship now?"

"You are my sweetheart now, and will be my wife some day!"

She flushed attractively.

"I didn't mean that. Let me see—Ben's mother and my mother were sisters. So Ben and I are cousins."

"And I am Ben's half-brother, so you and I are half-cousins."

He tried to speak in playful jest.

"No, we're not related at all!"

"Then we shall have to become related, at an early day."

"Uncle Philip is my uncle by marriage, but not my blood uncle. I am a cousin to Ben through my mother and his mother, who were sisters. So if I have no blood relationship with Uncle Philip, your father, I have none with you, for your mother was not related to me in any way."

"And I say again I am glad of it." He retained his jesting tone, though his mood was serious. "But if you marry me you are going to marry bad luck, for it seems that my name is Davison. You know the rhyme:

"'To change the name and not the letter,
Is to change for worse and not for better.'"

"You insist on joking about it. You know that Davison was not my father's name, but only the name I took when Uncle Philip adopted me."

"And that will break the bad luck spell!"

"Don't you think it will?"

"I think it will; I know it will!" he declared.

"I came to see you about something, as well as to congratulate you and sympathize with you."

"I tried to see you last night and failed."

"Yes, I know. I heard about it this morning. I wish I could have seen you last night, but it is as well this morning. What I want to ask you is if you intend to vote against the cattlemen to-day?"

The cheery light died out of his eyes.

"I have thought it over, and have talked with Mrs. Dudley, and it seems to me it is your duty to consider the matter very carefully now that you know your relationship to Uncle Philip."

A conservative by nature, and unconsciously influenced by the atmosphere of the Davison home, Lucy Davison had begun to fear that Justin was in the wrong. From that there was but a step to the conclusion that it was her duty to tell him so. She

did not dream that she was but a pawn in the game which was being played by Sibyl Dudley.

Justin looked into the earnest brown eyes, and his voice was grave.

"If any one in the world could make me vote against my opinion it would be you. I'm not going to argue with you, but let me say just this. If I vote with the cattlemen, or refuse to vote at all, it will place me in the position of sustaining them in a rebellious defiance of the national government, in addition to upholding the unsheltered range, a question on which perhaps we could not agree. But the fences which they maintain on government lands are so clearly illegal that the government has in some instances ordered them down. The cattlemen hope by sending a senator to Washington to have that order rescinded and the entire matter dropped. They have fenced untaken public lands, and lands which settlers occupy, or wish to occupy, and they want to continue this without interruption from Washington."

"You said you didn't intend to argue!"

"I do not intend to argue. I'm simply going to ask if you think I would be justified in using my vote, or withholding it, to continue a practice that is in defiance of the orders of the land department, even to please my own father?"

"That order is not, as I understand, a legal enactment, and it might be changed," she urged.

"It will be changed, no doubt, if the cattlemen win; but should it be changed, or withdrawn?"

"It seems to me that the settlers are doing well

enough, and those fences aren't injuring anybody."

He was silent a moment, thinking.

"I want to please your Uncle Philip—my father—and I want to please you. I'll admit that I have myself had some doubts on this question lately, serious doubts. Yet I cannot make myself think that I have not been in the right from the first. If I thought I was wrong I would change in a minute without regard to the consequences."

"It wouldn't be right for me to urge you to vote against your conscience," she admitted, touched by his fine sense of honor. "Only, as I've tried to think it over and get at the right of it, it has seemed to me that there are, must be, two sides to the question. Every question has two sides, you know."

"Yes; that is so."

She went on, not sure of her ground, nor altogether certain of herself; yet feeling that this was a crucial moment and that every argument ought to be duly weighed and considered.

"You won't feel hurt if I remind you that you are inexperienced? New light may come to you, so that the opinions you now hold you may not hold a year from now."

"That is true; but so long as I do hold them I must be honest about it."

"It is the opinion of Uncle Philip that this annoyance of the settlers cannot last. He says there are only a few places where they can farm successfully. But in the meantime, while they are trying every place, they are making a vast amount of trouble, by thus spreading all over the country. You

know, yourself, that some of them are taking land where water can never be got to it. The immediate result will be, Uncle Philip says, that the ranchmen will be almost ruined, by being forced to surrender land to them that can never be fit for anything but a cattle range. The settlers will find out by and by that the land cannot be farmed; but while they are finding it out, and bringing loss to themselves, they will bring the downfall of the cattlemen."

"I have thought of all these things," he said.

He looked at her earnestly. He was troubled.

"Lucy, I wish I only knew what I ought to do in this crisis! I must face it and do something. I have looked for your Uncle Philip, and intend to look for him again, and shall try to have a talk with him. He is my father, and when he knows that he is, and I ask him to advise me as a father would advise a son——." He stopped, in hesitation. "Anyway, whatever I do—whatever I do—remember that I love you!"

As soon as she was gone, he began another search for his father, driven by the feeling that he must explain fully to Davison his views and motives, as well as hear Davison's arguments and opinions, and so perhaps be able to stand erect in Philip Davison's estimation, as well as in his own. This was an anxious, even a wild desire, and it pressed him hard.

Fogg, scenting a reconciliation, sent a messenger in hurried search of Davison. At the hotel, and at the state house, the lobbies were overflowing. Men began to come to Justin not singly but in platoons. Somehow the word had gone round that he was

weakening. But he was not ready to talk. To friends and enemies alike he was non-committal. He wanted to see his father; he wanted to place in his hands that memorandum book, and get an acknowledgment of their relationship. The interminable buzz of the anxious and excited politicians struck against deaf ears.

Philip Davison was out of town.

Fogg, with telegraph and telephone, was wildly trying to reach him. Sibyl Dudley had come to the state house in shivering expectancy. The jarring hum of the political machine rose ever higher and higher, yet Justin gave no indication of a changed or changing purpose.

The ordeal through which he had passed since coming to Denver had taught him how to keep silent amid the maddest tumult. At first he had sought to justify whatever course he intended to pursue, only to find his statements snapped up, distorted, spread abroad with amendments he had never thought of, and so mutilated that often even he could not recognize the mangled fragments. So, having learned his lesson well, he kept still. Other men could do the talking. To the men who besieged him he had "nothing to say." Until he saw Philip Davison and placed that diary in his hands he felt that he could have nothing to say. Even then he might act without saying anything. From time to time he observed Fogg watching him covertly.

While he waited, senate and house convened and began to vote for the senatorial candidates. Fogg went into the senate chamber, after speaking to a

member of the lower house. Justin, whose name was far down on the rolls, remained in the lobby until a sergeant-at-arms came summoning members of the house to vote. Then he entered. When he dropped heavily into his seat he was greeted by suppressed cheering and a buzz of anxious and excited comment. These things did not move him; what moved him was a mental view of his father's face, and that inner tide of feeling demanding the satisfaction of a father's love.

Suddenly he recalled Fogg's covert and anxious looks, and like a flash came the question: Could this whole thing be but a plot to bewilder him and cause him to vote with the ranchmen, or not at all? He knew that Lucy would not deceive him, but she might herself be deceived. He could not doubt that record in the handwriting of his mother, but after all the reference might be to another Philip Davison. His nerves tingled and his brain reeled under the influence of this startling suggestion.

While thus bewildered, his name was called. He half rose, staggering to his feet, hardly knowing what his physical actions were. But his mind began to clear Clayton's face, the dream of Peter Wingate, and that picture of the unsheltered range, rose before him; again he saw the illegal fences; again starving cattle looked at him with hungry eyes, and their piteous moans were borne to him on the breath of the freezing wind. Once more he was the thrall of the past. His courage stiffened, the firm will was firm again. He felt that there was but one rock on which he could set his trembling feet, and that was

the rock of righteousness. If in this crucial moment he failed to stand for that which in his innermost soul he knew to be right, the self-respect which had nurtured his sturdy young manhood would be gone. His face whitened and his hand shook; but his voice was firm, when he announced his vote. It rang with clear decision through the silence that had fallen on the house.

Sibyl Dudley had lost.

CHAPTER XI

FATHER AND SON

PHILIP Davison saw Lucy before she returned to Paradise Valley and learned from her the strange story which had been told by William Sanders. From Fogg and others he had already heard how Justin had voted. And the discovery that even after Justin had been informed of this relationship he had voted against the cattlemen hardened his heart. He refused to see Justin now, and went back to Paradise Valley angry and uncomfortable. There he sought out Sanders and obtained the story direct from him.

After his talk with Sanders, a talk in which Sanders revealed to the full the bitterness and vindictiveness of his narrow mind, Philip Davison shut himself up in his room at the ranch house, where he would not see any one, and through the greater part of the night sat reviewing the past, while he smoked many cigars. The drinking habit which had been the curse of his earlier years he had conquered. Since the night in which his wife had fled never to return, he had not set liquor to his lips; and Ben's growing habits of intoxication threw him continually into a rage. Only that morning, encountering Clem Arkwright and Ben together in the town and

seeing that both had been drinking, he had cursed Arkwright to his face, and with threats and warnings had ordered Ben home. That Ben had not obeyed did not make Philip Davison's cup the sweeter that night.

The prosaic accuracy of the details of the story told by Sanders, with what he knew himself, convinced Davison of its truth, in spite of his previous belief that the cloud-burst which came shortly after his wife had fled from home had engulfed and slain both her and her child. His belief of her death had been based on the fact that nearly a year after her disappearance the unidentified bodies of a woman and child had been found in the foothills; and in a little, remote cemetery, where these bodies rested, a simple slab held the names of Esther and Justin Davison.

Davison recalled now that it was the name, more than anything else, that had induced him to give Justin employment on the ranch. The name of Justin and the memories it evoked had touched some hidden tendril of his heart, and had made him kind to Justin at times when but for that he might have been otherwise. As often as he had felt inclined to turn upon Justin in hot anger that name had softened his wrath. He had never a thought that Justin was his son; yet the name had won for Justin a warmer place in his regard than Justin could have won by his own merits.

As Davison sat thus in the shadowed memories of the past, there came to him a stirring of natural affection. But, whenever he turned to what he con-

sidered Justin's dastardly betrayal of the ranch interests, this vanished. To combat it there was, too, a long-smoldering feeling against the woman who had deserted him, and who by so doing had revealed to the world his drunken rage and cruelty. That desertion he had never been quite able to forgive. For years he had tried not to think of her; but that night her memory rose strong and buoyant. He knew he had wronged her deeply, and had outraged her feelings cruelly. Perhaps that was at bottom why this long-smoldering recollection of her aroused his smothered anger.

By degrees, as he thought over the past, Davison began to resent what seemed an injury done him. It was as if fate had preserved this boy through all the years to avenge the wrongs of the mother. His own son had risen to oppose him, to thwart his desires, to smite him with mailed fist. And he had helped unwittingly to fit fighting armor to the stalwart shoulders of this son; for it was through his position on the ranch, as the companion and friend of the cowboys, that Justin had arrived at that condition of comradeship with them which had really given him his present place. Davison felt that Ben should have held that position—Ben, who had the ranch interests at heart, and would have voted right. Ben was disobedient, wild, intractable, but Ben would have voted right! Davison loved Ben. Justin seemed still an outsider, an intruder. And the feeble stir of natural affection passed away.

Justin remained in Denver through the remainder of the legislative session and cast his vote with the

agriculturists on a number of questions. He wrote to Lucy frequently, but she did not re-visit Denver, so he did not see her again until his return to Paradise Valley. In her letters she acquainted him fully with the fact that Philip Davison did not feel kindly toward him. Justin wrote a letter also to Davison, but it was not answered. He did not again see Sibyl Dudley, nor Mary Jasper. And Fogg apparently had been permanently alienated.

When Justin came home, and it was known at the ranch that he was at Clayton's, Philip Davison sent for him. Justin obeyed the summons with anxious hesitation, and took the little memorandum book with him, and also his mother's Bible. He had not sent the diary to Davison with the letter as proof of their relationship, and he was resolved not to part with it now. Davison might examine it as much as he liked, but he should not keep it, nor should he destroy it.

Davison received Justin in the upper room where he had sat that night thinking of the past. His bearded face was flushed and his manner was constrained. Justin had a sense of confusion, as he stood face to face with this man whom he now knew to be his father. It seemed an unnatural situation. Yet in his heart was still that longing for a father's recognition and love. He had not put off the clothing he had worn while in the city; he might not do so at all, as he did not intend to become again a cowboy or work on a ranch. That phase of his life was past. Philip Davison never wore cowboy clothing, except when engaged in actual work on the range or

at the branding pens. Yet he was not dressed at his best, as he now received his son; and having come in from a long ride, his black coat was still covered with dust.

The blue eyes of the father and of the son met. Justin was as tall, and his features much resembled those of his father. But while one face was beardless, and young and strong, the other was bearded and prematurely aged. In Davison's reddish beard, which was worn full and long, were many strands of white, and whitening locks showed in his thick dark hair. The blue eyes were heavy, and the fleshy pads beneath them seemed to have increased in fullness and size. Justin even fancied there were new lines in the seamed and florid face. Justin's face was flushed and his swelling heart ached, as he stood before his father.

Davison waved him to a chair without extending his hand in greeting, and Justin sat down. Then Davison took a seat and looked at him across the intervening distance as if he would read there the truth or falsity of Sanders' story. Apparently he was satisfied.

"I have had a talk with Sanders," he began, speaking slowly and with an effort. "You have a memorandum book which I should like to see."

Justin produced it with fumbling fingers. Philip Davison took it without apparent emotion, and opening it looked it through. Having done so he closed it and passed it back. In the same way he examined the Bible which Justin gave him.

"You are my son; I haven't seen any of your

mother's handwriting for a long time, but I recognize it readily. The story told in that diary has been naturally colored by her feelings. I hope I am not quite as black as she has painted me. But all that is past, and it is not my intention to talk about it now. The point is, that you are my son. Since hearing about this matter I have been thinking over our relationship and asking myself what I ought to do. As my son, when I die I shall see that you are not unprovided for; but the bulk of my property will go to Ben, with something for Lucy. I wasn't always as prosperous as I am now; I've had to fight for what I've got, and I still have to fight to keep it. I have done and am doing this for Ben. Your sympathies have been from the first with those who are my enemies, and in the legislature you voted with them from beginning to end. You were elected chiefly by ranch votes, and you betrayed all of the ranch interests. The thing is done now, and can't be undone; yet, after all my struggles, it is not pleasant to know that the hand of my own son did this thing."

He settled heavily back in his chair.

"So the most of what I have will go to Ben. He is wild, but he will settle down; I was wild in my youth. You are like your mother. She was an obstinate angel with an uncomfortable conscience, and for some men such a woman is an unpleasant thing to live with."

Justin felt a swelling of indignation at this mention of his mother.

"You have all of her obstinacy and general wrong-

headedness on matters which don't concern you. I am willing to say to you frankly, that after a brief experience with her I ceased to desire to live with her; but even yet I do not think she had any good reason to leave me as she did. It took her to her death, and in the long run has made you pretty much what you are. So I do not see that I can blame you in all things, but I do blame you for the pig-headed obstinacy and foolishness you showed in Denver. You had a great opportunity to befriend those who had befriended you and would have helped you, and you wilfully, even maliciously, threw it away."

In spite of his feelings Justin maintained a discreet silence. His longing for something more than a bare recognition of his relationship he saw was not to be gratified. He had returned the diary and the Bible to his pocket, where he felt them close against his heart. They seemed akin to an actual memory of his mother, and could not be taken from him, whatever happened. Their pressure was almost as the touch of his mother's warm hand on his bosom.

"If you like," Davison went on, "you may transfer yourself to this house and remain here, doing what work on the ranch you please. Some of the cowboys have been dismissed, and others will be soon. But for this fact that you are my son I should forbid you to come upon the place. There is going to be a change in the business, too; your votes at Denver helped to make that necessary, and perhaps in that change you may find work more congenial to you than ranch work. Think it over. I want to do what is right by you. I will see that you have em-

ployment if you want it, and in my will I shall see that you are not wholly unprovided for. That is all."

He arose, and Justin stood up in flushed confusion, having said not a word either in justification of himself or his mother. He had no words now, as he passed from the room and from the house, though if he could have voiced anything it would have been the disappointment that murmured in his heart.

With the memory of that interview oppressing him, Justin questioned whether he had not after all been stubborn, pig-headed, and cruel. He reflected that perhaps he had been, even though he had sought to do only that which was right. His mother, he had been told, possessed an "uncomfortable conscience," and he did not doubt he had one himself. It could not be wrong to do right, of course, but at times it seemed very inexpedient. Should a man bend himself to expediency? If he had done so, his father would have received him doubtless with warm words, instead of that biting chill which frosted the very glance of the sunshine.

Standing in the yard oppressed and tortured by doubt, Justin saw Lucy Davison coming toward him from the direction of the little grove. The cottonwoods were still bare, but that she had visited them seemed a good omen, and he moved toward her.

Her brown eyes smiled as they met his. She was temptingly beautiful; a mature woman now, with the beauty of a fragrant flower. Her clear complexion had not changed since her girlhood, and the tint which emotion gave to her cheeks was as the soft

blush of the ripening peach. She was more beautiful than when a girl; all the angularities of girlhood were gone; and when from his greater height Justin looked down on her rounded throat and swelling bosom, and caught that kindly light in her eyes, he forgot the chill of the room from which he had come and the cold calm of his father's speech.

"I am afraid you are a bad, bad boy," she said, with a touch of sympathy, as she put her hand on his arm, "but I hope Uncle Philip hasn't been saying terrible things to you. You have been to see him, I know?"

"Yes, I have been to see him, and the interview wasn't wholly pleasant. Perhaps I have been the bad boy you suggest, and he may be justified; I'm sure I don't know. All I know is I tried to do what was right, and appear to have made a mix of it."

"Come in and we will talk it over. Uncle Philip told me this morning that you may come and go all you want to, or even make your home here now. That is pleasant news, anyway, isn't it?"

Her pleasant manner softened the recollection of that painful interview with Philip Davison. So Justin passed from an unpleasant interview to one so pleasant that it almost took the bitterness and the sting out of the first.

CHAPTER XII

CHANGING EVENTS.

AMONG those who were first to welcome Justin on his return to Paradise Valley were Steve and Pearl Harkness. They came to Clayton's with their little daughter, of whom they were proud. They made their call in the evening. Harkness was clad in new brown over-alls and jacket of the same material, and looked too big for them. Mrs. Harkness rustled in a dress of real China silk, whose shade of red made her round red face seem even hotter and redder than it was. Helen was fluffy in white skirts that stood out like those of a ballet dancer. Clayton in his dusty snuff-colored clothing, and Justin in his business suit of checked gray were insignificant figures compared with Pearl Harkness and her daughter.

"Now, Helen, what was it I told you to do?" said Pearl, lifting a plump round finger and shaking it at Helen, as soon as Harkness had finished his boisterous greetings.

Helen hesitated, and Pearl catching her up deposited her in Justin's lap.

"Now, what was it I told you to do?"

Then Helen remembered. Putting her chubby arms about Justin's neck and leaning hard on his

breast, while she squeezed to the utmost of her strength, she said:

"I love you, Dustin; I love you!"

Justin clasped her tightly in his strong arms.

"I love you, too!" he declared, and kissed her.

Standing by while he held Helen thus, Pearl, with a touch that was almost motherly, pushed the clustering dark locks back from his forehead, revealing the scar of a burn. She gave it a little love pat.

"You won't mind?" she said, and to Justin's surprise her voice choked with a sudden rush of tears. "You seem almost like my own boy, Justin. You weren't much more than a boy, you know, when you first came to the ranch; and I can't help remembering how you got that scar. I wanted to see if it had gone away any."

Harkness coughed suspiciously.

"If you ever git married, and your wife pulls out so much of your hair that you're bald-headed, that scar's goin' to show," he said.

Pearl caught Helen out of Justin's lap, with sudden agitation.

"Helen, you're getting dirt all over Justin's nice new clothes!" With bare plump hand she brushed away some infinitesimal specks which Helen's shoes had left. "I ought to have looked at her shoes before I put her up there! Why didn't you tell me to, Steve? Helen, you'll never be a lady, unless you keep your shoes clean."

"All them heroes and hero-wines of Pearl's keeps their shoes ferever spick an' span an' shinin'," said Harkness. "People always do, you'll notice, in

books; at least them she reads about do. She was readin' a book yisterday, and I looked at the picture of the hero. He had boots on that come to his thighs, and they'd jist been blacked. And the women in them books wear more fine clothes than you could find in a milliner's shop."

"Clothes aren't found in a milliner's shop, Steve!" Pearl corrected, as she settled Helen firmly on her feet and proceeded to spread out the fluffy white skirts. "Justin will think you don't know anything."

Helen, escaping from her mother's clutches, and apparently glad to escape, made straight for Harkness, who caught her up, planted on her cheek a resounding kiss, and then plumped her down astride of one big knee. Pleased by this preference, his face was radiant.

"Justin," his eyes shone with enthusiasm and delight, "there ain't anything like bein' married. Try it. I used to think I was havin' fun, cuttin' round skittish and wild like a loose steer on the range; this ain't fun, mebbe, it's comfort."

"From what I hear, Justin intends to try it one of these days," said Pearl, with a questioning look. "Don't you think he is, Doctor Clayton? You're hearing things like that, aren't you?"

Clayton laughed, and glanced at Justin's flushing face.

"I can't say what his intentions are, but if they concern a certain young lady I could name, they have my hearty approval."

"Yet it does seem almost like marrying relatives,"

said Pearl. "I can't get used to that yet. I had a cousin that married another cousin; and their children—well, you just ought to see their children!"

"Monkeys, air they?" said Harkness.

"Monkeys! Why, Steve, they're plum fools! They don't know enough to come into the house when it rains."

"This would be a good country fer 'em to live in, then; don't rain here more'n onc't in a year, and I reckon they could strain their intellects enough to git a move on 'em that often."

He looked at Justin.

"Speakin' of this country and rain, we're reckonin', Pearl and me, that we'll take up farmin', fer a change; think it might be healthy fer our pocket book. I've had notice from Davison to quit, the first of the month. I told him I'd quit to-morrow, if it suited him and he had a man to put in my place; that if he didn't think I was earnin' all the good money I got and a little bit more, I did, and I stood ready to go on short notice, or without any notice at all. I've knowed it was comin' this good while, and I've been gittin' ready fer it. Davison and Fogg air sellin' off a good many cattle. The rest they're goin' to throw onto the mesa, an' water at the water holes of the Purgatoire; the gover'ment is orderin' down the fences, and it would take an army of cowboys to hold the cattle off the crops, with them fences gone."

Clayton was interested.

"Do you think of farming here in the valley?" he asked.

" Yes, we're figgerin' on buyin' Simpson's place; it's well up toward the head of the ditch, and if any water comes we're reckonin' that will give us a whack at it. Simpson's made me an offer to sell. I'm jist waitin' to see what's goin' to turn up here in the ditch line."

" I tell him he'll wait round till it's too late," said Pearl. " Fogg will buy that land before he knows it; he's buying up farms everywhere, for himself and Davison.

She turned to Justin with a smile.

"I've been wondering if you wouldn't get married and settle down to farming, too; you never liked ranching."

Pearl was as much of a match-maker as any dowager of her favorite novels.

" Pearl won't never be satisfied until that weddin' comes off," said Harkness. " These women air bound to have a weddin' happenin' about onc't in so often, er they ain't happy; if it can't be their own weddin', another woman's will do. The weddin's of a neighborhood air what keeps the old maids alive, I reckon; they live ferever, ye know, drawin' happinness out of other women's marriages."

" I'm not an old maid! " Pearl asserted with spirit.

" No; I happened along! "

Before Mr. and Mrs. Harkness departed that evening, Dicky Carroll, galloping by, stopped for a few moments.

" I've got a job over at Borden's," he announced to Harkness. " He'll be a better man to git along with than Davison, anyway; so I'm kinder glad to

go. And if I stay round hyer longer I'll be tempted to shoot Ben full of handsome little holes; he's been meaner than a polecat to me ever sense that election."

Then he shook hands with Justin and Clayton, who had come out into the yard. The moonlight revealed him in full cowboy attire, with his rope coiled at the saddle bow.

"They're sayin', Justin, that you helped to bu'st the cattle bizness round hyer. I ain't believin' it; but if you did, what's the dif? There'll be plenty of ranches fer as long a time as I'm able to straddle a pony and sling a rope, ranches back where the farmers can't go. When I can't ride a horse any longer I'll quit cow-punchin' and go to playin' gentleman like Ben. From the fine clothes he wears I judge there's money in it. Well, so long; luck to all of you!"

Fogg did not vary from his custom, when he visited Paradise Valley. He came over to Clayton's, and sat in the little study, in the chair he loved, which, though big, was now almost too small for him. He put his fat hands on the arms of the chair, stretched out his fat legs, and with his watch chain shining like a golden snake across his big stomach, talked as amiably and laughed as loudly as ever.

Lemuel Fogg believed that it is better to bend before the storm than to be broken by it. The government at Washington had heard from the farming settlers and irrigationists of the West. Many states had spoken that winter, and their voice had been as one. The agricultural element, feeble and scorned at first, was becoming a power. Congress, heeding

its voice, was beginning to devise ways and means by which vast areas of public land hitherto thought fit only for grazing, if for that, could be watered by irrigation. Even the East, long hostile because it did not want more rich Western lands opened to compete with Eastern agriculture, held modified opinions. The order of the land department for the removal of the illegal fences on the public domain was to be enforced, and the fences had begun to come down. Seeing the hand of fate, Fogg and Davison had sold some of their cattle, were contracting their grazing area, and had begun to take thought of other things.

"We'll go with the tide," said Fogg, whom Davison followed in most things pertaining to matters of business, for Fogg's success had been phenomenal. "What do we care whether it's cattle or something else, if we can get money out of it? Never buck against the government; it's too strong, and you'll get into trouble. We'll turn farmer; we'll irrigate."

So Fogg and Davison were increasing their already considerable holdings of land in Paradise Valley, by purchases from settlers and from the mortgage companies. It was reported that in some places ranchmen secured land by inducing their cowboys to settle on quarter-sections and so obtain title from the government. Fogg and Davison would not do that. Not because they were too scrupulous, but because they were too wise. It would be an unpleasant thing to be haled into court for land swindling by the government agents who were ordering down the fences.

While thus securing the land, they had quietly obtained a controlling interest in the irrigating canal which the settlers had constructed. It was owned by a stock company; and before the farmers knew what was occurring it was to all intents and purposes in the possession of Davison and Fogg.

"It begins to look as though you were right, Justin, and that I was wrong, up there in Denver," said Fogg, sliding his fingers along his watch chain and beaming on Justin. "I couldn't see it then, but it really looks it; anyway, your side seems to be winning out, and I didn't think it could."

"I thought I was right," Justin declared, with vigorous aggressiveness.

"Yes, I know you did; but I thought you was wrong, and of course I had to oppose you. But, anyway, it's all right now; we're going to make it all right. Some few of the farmers are kicking because Davison and I have got control of the ditch, but they'll live to bless the day the thing happened. We'll strengthen their dam and enlarge the canal and laterals and furnish plenty of water. Where they watered ten acres we'll water hundreds. We've got the money to do it with, and they hadn't; that's the difference."

His shining watch chain rose and fell on his heaving stomach, as he talked. Looking at it, Justin could almost fancy it had been wrought of that gold which Fogg, with heavy but nimble fingers, gathered from even the most unpromising places. Fogg seemed almost a Midas.

Fogg did not take his departure before midnight, but when he went he was in a very good humor with himself and all the world.

CHAPTER XIII

IN PARADISE VALLEY

COMING one forenoon from the kitchen, where she had been instructing the new cook installed in the position Pearl had held so long, Lucy observed Justin walking in a dejected manner down the trail that led to Clayton's, and saw that he had been in conversation with Philip Davison. She knew what that conversation had been about, and when Davison came into the house she followed him up to his room. There was a heightened color in her cheeks, as she stood before her guardian. He looked up, a frown on his florid face.

"What is it?" he asked almost gruffly; but she was not to be put down.

"You won't mind telling me what you said to Justin awhile ago?"

She slid into a chair, and sat up very straight and stiff.

"You sent him to me, I suppose?"

"I didn't, but I have known he meant to speak to you."

"He wants to marry you!"

"That isn't news to me."

"No, I suppose it isn't. But what has he got to marry on?"

"Now, Uncle Philip, I'm going to say what I think! Justin is your son, and every father owes something to his child. Don't you think so?"

Davison's blue eyes snapped, but he would not be angry with this favorite niece.

"Well, yes, I suppose so, if you put it that way."

"Justin and I have been just the same as engaged for a long time."

"Yes, I've known that, too. I told him to show what there was in him; and," his tone became bitter, "he has shown it!"

Lucy refused to become offended.

"Of course we can't marry unless you help him along. Justin has been wanting to go to Denver. He thinks he could do well there by and by, after he became acquainted and had a start. Doctor Clayton knows a man there to whom he will give him a letter. But expenses are something terrific in a city, and we should have to wait a long time before Justin could work up to a salary that would justify us in getting married."

"So it's *you* that want's to get married, is it?"

"I am *one* who wants to get married; Justin is the other."

Davison laughed in changing mood.

"What do you demand that I shall do?"

"I don't demand anything, I simply suggest."

"Then what do you suggest? He had the nerve to say that he thinks he is capable of managing the new ditch."

"I simply suggest that you help him in some way, as a father who is able to should. He has worked

for you a long time for very small wages; wages so small that he could save nothing out of them, as you know. I think that you ought to start him on one of the farms you have recently bought, or else give him some good position, with a salary that isn't niggardly. It seems to me he is capable and worthy."

"If I don't give him a position, that will postpone this most important marriage?"

"I don't want him to go to Denver."

A smile wrinkled Davison's face and lighted his blue eyes.

"You are a good girl, Lucy; and Justin is a—is a Davison! And that means he is hard-headed and has a good opinion of himself. I'll think about it. Now run down and see that the cook doesn't spoil the dinner. She burnt the bread yesterday until it was as black as coal and as hard as a section of asphalt pavement. By the way, I don't suppose you could cook or do housework?"

"Try me!" she said, relaxing.

And she departed, for she did not yet trust the new cook.

The next day Davison offered Justin the position of ditch rider, at a salary that made Fogg wince and protest, though he believed Justin to be the very one for the place. That Justin should be given this position seemed even to Fogg advisable, as a business consideration. The "rider" of the canal and ditches comes into closer relationship with the water users than any other person connected with an irrigation company. He sees that the water is properly measured and delivered, and he makes the equitable pro

rata distribution when the supply is low or failing. Justin had the confidence of the farmers; and, as there were sure to be many complaints, he would be a good buffer to place between them and the company.

Justin accepted the position. In a financial sense, it promised to advance him very materially; and the prospect of the proper irrigation of Paradise Valley pleased both him and Clayton. It was the beginning of the fulfillment of Peter Wingate's dream. Yet Justin knew he was asked to undertake a difficult task. Even when they had everything in their own hands, the farmers had wrangled interminably over the equitable distribution of the water.

Having control of the source of supply and of the canal and laterals, the first act of Fogg and Davison was to offer water to the farmers at increased rates. They were strengthening the dam, and widening the canal and laterals, at "terrific cost," Fogg claimed, and reimbursement for this necessary outlay was but just.

It was Fogg who planned and Fogg who executed. This was new business to him, but no one would have guessed it. Over his oily, scheming face hovered perpetual sunshine. His manner and his arguments subdued even intractable men. It was said of him that he could get blood out of a grindstone. What he said of himself was, "Whenever I see that the props are kicked out from under me, I plan to have some kind of a good cushion to land on." The cushion in this case was the exploitation

of the inevitable, the irrigation of Paradise Valley, for the benefit of the exploiters.

Many new settlers were drawn in by attractively-worded advertisements. Then one of the things Justin had feared came to pass. Fogg sold more water than he could deliver, trouble arose, and this trouble descended, in great measure, on the head of the ditch rider. In spite of all he could do to distribute the water fairly complaints and protests were made.

Fogg had planned for this condition, and he was iron. He claimed that an unusually dry year had worked against the success of the company; and as there was a clause in the water notes covering such a failure to supply water, the farmers were forced, sometimes under the sheriff's hammer, to pay the notes they had given. Buying sometimes from the sheriff, and sometimes through second parties from the farmers themselves, for numbers of them, in disgust, were willing to sell and leave the country, before the end of the first year Fogg and Davison had greatly increased their land holdings, by "perfectly legitimate" methods.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DOWNWARD WAY

MAKING the rounds of the house one night before retiring, Lucy came upon Ben Davison rummaging through the desk in his father's room. The drawers of the desk had been pulled out, the small safe had been opened, and papers littered the chairs and floor. Surprised thus, Ben faced her with an angry oath. She saw that he had been drinking. Instead of putting color into his pale face, intoxication always made it unnaturally white and set a glassy stare in his eyes.

"What are you doing here, Ben?" she demanded.

"I'm looking for money," he declared surlily. "Is it any of your business?"

"I think it is, when you begin to look for it in this way. Uncle Philip doesn't know you're up here."

"I'm going to have money, that's what!" he snarled. "Let him give me the money I need, instead of driving me to tricks like this."

"He gave you money only the other day; I saw him."

"How much? A hundred dollars! There's money in this room, or there was, and I know it; and I'm going to have it. I'm going to have as much as I want, too, when I get my hands on it."

"I shall have to report you, Ben!"

He caught her fiercely by the shoulders, with a clutch that made her wince and cry out in pain.

"You have hurt me, Ben!" she sobbed.

"I'll kill you, if you come meddling with my affairs!"

He pushed her against the wall, and faced her with so threatening a mien that she was frightened. The glare in his glassy eyes was enough to make her tremble.

"If you say anything about this I'll kill you! Do you hear? And if you know where the money is I want you to tell me."

"I don't know anything about it," she declared.

"Curse you, I believe you do! I want money, and I'm going to have it. I've got to have a thousand dollars; it's here, and I know it."

He began to search again, tossing the papers about.

"Uncle Philip never keeps so much money as that in the house, and you should know that he doesn't."

"Well, he could get it for me if he wanted to. He's got plenty of money. I'm tired of being treated like a beggar. He says he's carrying on his business so that he'll have money to leave me when he's dead; but that isn't what I want—I want it now."

"Won't you go down stairs, Ben?" she begged. "You almost broke my shoulder, but I shan't mind that if you will go down stairs; and I'll straighten up these papers for you and return them to their places."

"I won't! I'm going to see if that money he got from Fogg yesterday is here."

"He put it in the bank of course, Ben; he wouldn't run the risk of keeping it in the house."

"You go down stairs or I'll make you," he threatened.

She did not go.

"What do you want the money for—to pay a gambling debt to Arkwright?"

"Arkwright!" he screamed at her. "It's always Arkwright! But I'll tell you, this money isn't for him. Instead of troubling me, why don't you go to that puler, Justin? He'll be glad to see you, maybe; I'm not. So clear out."

"He is your brother!"

"My half-brother, *he* says; I've not acknowledged the relationship yet!"

She could do nothing with him, and she retreated down the stairs. For some time she heard him walking about; then he descended and left the house. When he was gone she went up to the room and found that he had tried to re-arrange the papers, but had made a mess of it. She put them away as well as she could, and closed the drawers and the safe. She did not believe that he had secured any money, but she did not know. And she passed a bad night, not knowing whether to acquaint Davison with this latest of Ben's escapades or not.

CHAPTER XV

MARY'S DESPAIR

JUSTIN had found Sloan Jasper one of the most troublesome of the water users. Jasper was almost as hard to please as William Sanders; and only the day before Sanders had denounced Justin as being in league with the company to defraud the farmers. For these reasons Justin always approached the farms of these men with trepidation. Trouble was brewed on each visit.

The trouble which brewed at Sloan Jasper's on this particular occasion was, however, wholly unexpected, and of quite a different kind. Jasper came out to the trail with an anxious air.

"Mary is in the house and wants you to stop in and see her."

Justin dismounted to enter the house. He had not known that Mary was at home.

"It's about Ben," said Jasper, "and I wish he was in hell! The way he is carryin' on is killin' my girl by inches."

With this stout denunciation of Ben ringing in his ears Justin went in to see Mary. She had been crying. Jasper followed him into the house and stood within the doorway, in an uneasy, angry attitude, holding his soiled hat in his hands.

"I wanted to see you about Ben," said Mary, rising to greet Justin.

Her cheeks were pale and her eyes lacked lustre. With that rose-leaf color gone, her face was so pallid that it deepened by contrast the darkness of her eyes and her hair. She was rather handsome, in spite of all, in one of those Denver dresses chosen by Sibyl Dudley, which served to make her look taller and more stately than she was.

Mary's desire was to have Justin do something to induce Ben to let liquor alone. She acknowledged that she had lost all control over him, if she had ever had any. More than once he had treated her brutally while in a fit of intoxication. Yet she had clung to him. Having won her girlish love, he still held it. She had long hoped that he would abandon his wild ways after awhile and become a sober, sensible man, to whom she could trust her life and happiness. She admitted that the hope was growing faint.

"I don't see what I can do," said Justin, touched by her unhappiness, and perplexed. "If I go to Ben and say anything to him he will only insult me. He hasn't liked me for a long time, as you know."

"Perhaps if you would speak to Mr. Davison," Mary urged, with pathetic persistence.

Justin was sure that would present almost as many difficulties. He knew that Philip Davison had long reasoned with Ben, and raved at him, in vain.

"Since it's known that you are his half-brother, I thought possibly you could do something. I've tried until I don't know what to try next."

"Give the scamp the go-by," said Jasper hotly. "Throw him over. Have some spunk about you, can't ye? Why, if I was a woman, and a man should treat me as he has you, I'd send him hummin' in a jiffy; I wouldn't stand it."

"But you don't understand, father."

"Don't I? I understand too tarnal well. If I had my way I'd kick his ornery carcass out of this house, if he ever ventured to set foot in it ag'in. That'd be my way. Any other way is a fool's way, and you ought to know it."

"Don't listen to him, Justin," said Mary, tearfully. "You must know how I feel, even if he doesn't. And if you can do anything to get Ben to stop drinking and running around with Clem Arkwright I wish you would."

Never more than at that moment did Justin long for some influence with Ben. He knew he had none. He made what promises he could, but they were not very assuring. Mary followed him to the door, still urging him.

Riding on, thinking of Mary, Justin encountered Lucy. She joined him, and they rode together along the homeward trail. When she rallied him on his depressed manner, he told her of Mary's appeal.

"Yes," she admitted, "I had heard she was at home, and I know only too well that Ben has been drinking more than ever of late. I can see that it is hurting Uncle Philip very much. He has always believed that when Ben sows what he calls his wild oats he will change and be a man, but I've doubted it. There isn't anything you can do, not a thing; but I

shall go to see Mary, and try to make her feel better."

She looked earnestly at Justin, riding beside her. He had put aside the checked business suit of gray, and was clad roughly, as became his muddy calling. Yet how manly he was, however he dressed; how broad his shoulders, how sturdy and well-knit his frame, how clear and open his countenance, and how intelligent and attractive the flash of his eyes, as he conversed with her! She knew that she loved him more than ever.

"One would never dream that you are related to Ben!"

"I hope I am not like him, even though he is my half-brother."

"You aren't, not in the least; I don't think I could like you so well as I do if you were."

"Then you do like me?"

He looked at her, smiling.

"It would be only natural for me to like the man I have promised to marry, wouldn't it?"

"I was merely hoping that you love me; like is too mild a word."

Then they began to talk again of that delightful day, ever hastening nearer, as they believed, when they should be not merely lovers, but husband and wife. It was a pleasant dream, and they lingered by the way, as they contemplated its beauties.

As they thus talked and loitered, Ben Davison came driving by in his dog-cart, with Clem Arkwright. Arkwright's pudgy form was not quite so pudgy, for he had not lived as well of late, but his

face and nose were as red as ever, and his old manner had not forsaken him. He bowed elaborately to both Lucy and Justin.

"A great day," he called, "a glorious day, and the old mountain is grand; just take a glance at it now and then as you ride along; you'll never see anything finer!"

Ben did not look at Justin; but to Lucy he shouted:

"I'm going to town to sell the horse and dog-cart. I told you I would. Arkwright knows a man who will buy them."

When Lucy called on Mary, she heard details of a story which Mary had not ventured to hint to Justin. Mary had made a discovery too long delayed. Ben's frequent visits to Denver were not merely to see her; the real attraction was Sibyl Dudley. Sibyl was the recipient of most of the money Ben had been able to wring from his father or gain at gambling. Her calls for money had increased his recklessness. Sibyl was the horse-leech's daughter, crying ever for more, and Ben was weak.

Mary had pedestaled Sibyl and believed in her, refusing to see aught but goodness, until her foolish belief became no longer possible. Then, with her eyes opened, she marvelled at her almost incomprehensible blindness. Why had she not seen before? If she had seen before she might have saved Ben, she thought. She recalled the genial Mr. Plimpton. Had Sibyl, by incessant demands for money, wrought the financial overthrow of Plimpton? Every suggestion that came to her now was sicken-

ing and horrible. Such an awakening is often disastrous in its results. Doubt of humanity itself is a fruit of that tree of knowledge, and that doubt had come to Mary.

Lucy took the unhappy girl in her arms. She was herself grieved and shocked.

"You poor dear!" was all she was able to say at first.

"And, oh, I am to blame for it all!" Mary sobbed, putting her arms about the neck of her comforter. "I can see what a fool I was, and it was pride that made me a fool. I went up there as ignorant as a child; I thought it would be fine to live in a city and be a lady and drive round in a carriage. How I hate that carriage! And that coachman. I know even he must have thought horrid things about me. And Plimpton! I know what Plimpton was now, and I hate him. It seems to me I could stamp on him if I saw him fall down in the street. And I—I hate—oh, there isn't a word strong enough to tell how I hate Mrs. Dudley! I thought she was an angel, and she is—is—a brute!"

"You poor dear!" said Lucy, smoothing back the dark hair from the fevered and tear-wet face. "You poor dear! You have been cruelly deceived and abused. It doesn't seem possible! I was as much deceived as you, for I thought Mrs. Dudley a very pleasant woman. There were some things about her I didn't like, about the way she dressed and painted, yet I never thought but that she was a good woman. I didn't suspect anything, for you told me she was rich."

"And that's what she told me, but she lied; she's been getting her money from fools like Plimpton and Ben. And I used her money, and lived in her house, and rode about in her carriage with all Denver gaping at me, and never knew a thing. Even this dress I have on was bought with her money. I want to tear it off and stamp it into the mud; but I haven't a thing to wear that she didn't get for me, not a thing. And my—my silly pride is to blame—is to blame for Ben, and everything. If I hadn't gone with her Ben might never have met her. But if Ben could only be induced to quit drinking, something could be done with him yet. I almost wish he would get sick; anything to keep him away from that woman."

"Did he say anything to you?"

"Yes, he did, when I hinted at what I had discovered and told him I had left Denver for good and all; he told me I was a little idiot. But I didn't mind that; I've got so used to his harsh words that I don't mind them; but this I couldn't stand, this about Sibyl. So then I put aside my shame, and I told him right to his face that I was a silly idiot or I would never speak to him again; and he confessed to me that he had been going there to see Mrs. Dudley more than me, and said he would go as often as he pleased, and that I could help myself; and he said, too, that he intended to marry her. But I know that isn't so; he would never marry her now. I told him he wouldn't, and begged him to remember his promises to me and keep away from her; and he told me

to shut my mouth and mind my own business. As if that isn't my own business!"

She began to cry again; and Lucy, holding her tightly, rocked her as if she were a child.

"And, oh, I was so happy! So happy, until I knew that! It was a selfish happiness I see now, but I thought it was true happiness. I thought everything of Mrs. Dudley—just everything; and I thought she loved me as much as I loved her; and to have this come! It breaks my heart, it breaks my heart! Oh, Ben, Ben!"

She lay in Lucy's arms. Their tears flowed together. But what could be said to comfort her?

"Did Mrs. Dudley say anything?"

"When I reproached her she was indignant and denied it; she cried, and said I was an ungrateful girl and did not deserve to have a friend. She declared that Ben came only to see me; but in her very confusion I could see that she was lying, for when my eyes began to open they became sharp as needles. Oh, I could see through her, after that! I told her she had stolen Ben from me, and all for his money, and that she was ruining him, and that it would kill me. I don't know what I said, for I was crazy, and I was crying so that I thought my heart would break. And just as soon as I could get out of the house I did, and I came right down here; but even then I had to use her money, a little money she had given me, to pay car fare, for I hadn't any other. But just the thought of it made me want to jump off that train and kill myself."

"You poor dear!"

And Lucy, holding her in a close embrace, kissed the tear-stained face.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WAGES OF SIN

THE knowledge of why Mary had returned so suddenly came first to Justin through Sloan Jasper himself. Jasper met Justin as he rode along the trail the next day, and told him all about it, without veiled words, and with many fierce oaths.

"He's killed my girl, damn him; broke her heart! She's home, cryin' her eyes out day and night, and all on account of him. She's a fool; I wouldn't look at the skunk ag'in, if't was me; but she's a woman and that accounts fer it, and it's killin' her."

Justin hastened to convey the news to Curtis Clayton, whom he found at home, in the front yard, engaged in freeing a butterfly from the spoke-like web of a geometric spider. A flush of indignation swept through Justin, as the thought came to him that perhaps Clayton had known all along and had kept silent. Clayton took the butterfly in his hands and began to remove the clinging mesh from its golden wings. When he had done so his fingers were smeared with its gold dust and it crawled along unable to fly. He regarded it thoughtfully.

"I've done the best I could; I released it, but I can't put the gold back on its wings, nor mend them.

The rest of its life it will be a draggled wreck, but luckily it's life will be short."

Then Justin told him what he had learned from Sloan Jasper.

Clayton cast the draggled butterfly away and sank to a seat on the door-step. His face filled with a troubled look. For a little while he said nothing.

"I suppose that I am partly to blame for that," he confessed, humbly. "I have never talked to you about Mrs. Dudley, but I will tell you now that she was once my wife."

Justin showed no surprise.

"I knew it."

"You knew it! How? I never mentioned it to you."

"No, but I have seen that photograph of her you have treasured, and I saw her that day of the rabbit hunt. Putting those two things together, with something that Mary told Lucy, made me sure that she had once been your wife."

Clayton was bewildered.

"Something Mary told Lucy?"

"Yes, about your arm; Mrs. Dudley told Mary how you came to have a stiff arm, and though she did not admit that she was the woman who caused it, and Mary did not suspect it then, Lucy did; and she told me about it."

Clayton stared at the butterfly crawling away through the grass.

"When I heard that Mary had gone with Mrs. Dudley to Denver, I rode over to Sloan Jasper's to tell him that I feared it was not wise. But, really,

I had nothing on which to base a charge, except my suspicions. I knew why I had left her, but nothing more. And my courage failed. I said nothing, and I should have said something. But," he leaned back wearily against the door, " when you come to love a woman as I loved her, Justin, you will perhaps know how I felt, and why I hesitated. I was weak, because of that love; that is all I can say about it."

The contempt growing for Clayton in Justin's heart was swept away. He knew what love, true love, is; the love which believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; which changes never, though all the world is changed.

" I loved her," Clayton went on, his deep voice trembling, " and rather than say anything that might not be true I said nothing. I did wrong. And I am punished, for this thing hurts me more than you can know."

Justin had come close to Clayton's heart many times, but never closer than now. He looked at the suffering man with much sympathy. Clayton swung his stiff arm toward the crawling butterfly.

" It can never be the same again; I was never the same again, nor can Ben be. It has been in the web, and its wings are broken and the gold gone. We think that under given circumstances we would not do certain things, but we don't know. Environment, heredity, passions of various kinds, selfishness, pull us this way and that; and when we declare, as so many do, that if we were this person or that we should not do as he or she does, we simply proclaim our ignorance. There is not a man alive who

knows himself to the innermost core of his being. I am a dozen men rolled into one, and the whole dozen are contemptible. I despise myself more than you can."

"Why should you say that?"

"You did despise me, or came near it, a moment ago; I saw it in your manner."

"Was my manner different? I didn't know it, and didn't intend that it should be. But I couldn't understand how you could keep still so long, if you knew."

"I kept still because I am a coward, and because I loved that woman. That explains everything; explains why I am here in Paradise Valley, living like a hermit. I wanted to get away, and I wanted to forget. I got away, but if one could take the wings of the morning he could never out-fly memory. I could never live happily with that woman, and I have never been able to live happily without her. When she came into my life she wrecked it. Some women are born to that fate, I suppose; and if that is so, perhaps they ought not to be blamed too severely. But I am sorry for Mary Jasper, and I am more than sorry for Ben. He was already going to the devil at a lively gait. Sibyl is one of those women whose feet take hold on hell, and she will drag him down with her, if he does not get out of her web, or is not helped out. And I'm afraid he can't be helped out."

Clayton set out to see Davison, and have a talk with him on this disagreeable subject; but, as be-

fore when he desired to speak to Sloan Jasper, he turned back without saying anything.

Davison seemed not to know what had occurred. He and Fogg went often to and from Denver, as they continued their work of exploiting Paradise Valley for the benefit of their pockets. From Denver they had brought an engineer, who had made a survey and report on the available sources of water. Behind a granite ridge, at the head of the valley, flowed Warrior River, a swift stream that wasted itself uselessly in the deep gorges that lay to the southwest. The engineer's report showed that a tunnel cut through that ridge would pour Warrior River into Paradise Creek and water many thousands of acres of land which could not now be touched.

"We'll do it later," Fogg had said to Davison, when they examined the plans and estimates. "It's going to take too much money right now. We'll try to get those thousands of acres into our own hands first. Then we'll cut that tunnel and build that dam, and we'll squeeze a fortune out of the business. We may have to float irrigating bonds, and put blanket mortgages on the land, but it will pay big in the end."

Davison was subservient to the man who had the Midas touch. It was still for Ben, all for Ben; to gain wealth for Ben he was permitting himself to be led by one who in matters of business never had a straight thought.

As they returned from Denver one night by a late train, a lantern was swung across the track at

the cut near the head of Paradise Valley, a mile above the town. The whistle screamed, and the air-brakes being applied, the train came to a stop so suddenly that the passengers were almost thrown from their seats. Before the grinding of the wheels had ceased shots were heard outside.

Fogg clutched the big wallet tucked in the inner pocket of his coat.

"By George, it's a hold-up," he cried, his fat body trembling, "and I've got a thousand dollars in cash here to give to those fool farmers who wouldn't accept our checks in payment for their land!"

He sank back into the seat, quivering like a bag of jelly. Fear of the loss of that money unnerved him. Davison was of different mold. As the shots continued, and he heard voices, and saw men jumping from their seats, he sprang into the aisle, tugging at the revolver he carried in his hip pocket. Fogg sought to restrain him.

"Sit down! Don't be a fool! Let the other fellows do the fighting. That's always my rule, and it's a good one. If I'm not troubled here, I'll promise not to trouble anybody."

But Davison was gone, following close after a man he saw hurrying to the platform. He and Fogg were in the smoking car, which was next to the combination baggage-and-express car. Other men dropped from the platform steps to the ground as he did, and some of them began to fire off their revolvers, shooting apparently into the air.

Davison was not a man to waste his ammunition

in a mere effort to frighten the robbers by the rattle of a harmless fusillade. He saw a masked figure moving near the forward car, and he let drive, with aim so true that the masked figure pitched forward on its face. The other robbers, disconcerted by the resistance, were already in retreat.

With a grim feeling of satisfaction Davison called loudly for a lantern. One was brought hurriedly; and a train man, whipping out his knife, severed the strings that held the mask in place over the face of the slain robber. Fogg was still in the smoker, his fat body shaking with fear.

As the mask dropped aside, the light of the lantern revealed to the startled gaze of Philip Davison Ben's pallid, dissipated face. He was bending forward to look, and with a hoarse and inarticulate cry he fell headlong across the body of his son.

One of the robbers was captured that night, as he attempted to escape into the hills. The town and the valley had been aroused. Steve Harkness led the capturing party, and short work was made of this robber. When morning dawned a rope and a telegraph pole alone upheld him from the earth. As the body swung at the sport of the wind, the blackened face was turned now and then toward the flat-topped mountain. On the breast was displayed this scrawl:

"SO'S HE CAN LOOK AT THE SCENERY."

The body was that of Clem Arkwright.

CHAPTER XVII

SHADOWS BEFORE

PHILIP DAVISON, conveyed to his home in Paradise Valley, hovered between life and death, attended by Doctor Clayton and waited upon by Lucy and Justin. Fogg lent a hand with hearty will, and Pearl Harkness, forgetting that there had ever been any disagreement between Davison and her husband, established herself again for a time in the Davison home, that she might assist Lucy. Steve Harkness, not to be outdone by his wife, offered his services in any way they could be utilized, and found that there was enough for him to do.

Davison improved somewhat, but could not leave his bed. From the strong man he had been reduced until he was as helpless as a child; and for a time his mental strength was but little better than his physical.

Before going back to Denver Fogg took Justin aside.

"I don't see but I shall have to ask you to look after things here, Justin, while I am gone."

"Command me in any way," said Justin.

"It's a lucky thing that you're capable of taking hold now. Some one ought to visit the Purgatoire

and see how the cattle are doing there, and some one must ride the ditch and look out for matters at this end of the line. Harkness can go to the Purgatoire; he will go if you ask him, though likely he wouldn't for me; and you can have charge here."

Fogg was mentally distressed. The shock had left its traces even on his buoyant nature. Through worry he had lost girth; the ponderous stomach on which the shining chain heaved up and down as he breathed heavily and talked was not so assertively protuberant, and his fat face had lost something of its unctuous shine. Somehow, though he could hardly account for it, for nothing in the shape of material wealth had so far been lost there by him, Paradise Valley oppressed him like a bad dream, and he was anxious to get away from it for a time.

"I shall be glad to do whatever I can," Justin declared.

"It's your own father who is lying in that room, which he'll never get out of I'm afraid, and I knew of course you'd be willing to help out now all you can. Clayton doesn't speak very favorably of the case. There isn't really anything the matter with Davison, so far as any one can see. It's his mind, I reckon; it must have been an awful shock to him, perfectly terrible, and it has simply laid him out. He thought everything of Ben. Well, I'm not a man to talk about the dead; but Ben would have tried the soul of a saint, and if I must say it to you I never saw anything very saintly in the character of your father."

"It's a good thing Harkness didn't move out of the valley when he left the ranch."

"A great thing for us now. He's dropped everything over on his farm and stays here almost night and day. I'll see that he doesn't lose by it."

While they were talking, William Sanders came up, chewing like a ruminant.

"When I had my fortune told that time in Denver the fortune teller said there was goin' to be a heap of trouble down here, and it's come. I don't reckon that Paradise Valley is any too lucky a place to live in, after all. But them that makes trouble must expect trouble."

Fogg did not deign to notice this.

"How are your crops, Mr. Sanders?" he asked, with his habitual smile.

"They might be better, if the ditch company and the ditch rider done their duty. I ain't scarcely had any water fer a week, and that field of millet in the northeast corner of my place is dry as a dust heap. I been wonderin' when I'll git water to it. That's why I come over."

Justin promised to see to it.

"Davison ain't doin' as well as he might, I hear?"

He plucked a straw and set it between his teeth.

"Not doing well at all," said Fogg.

"Well, it's a pity; but them that makes trouble must expect trouble."

When Lemuel Fogg returned to Paradise Valley a month later Philip Davison was not changed greatly. His mind was clear, but his physical con-

dition was low. Clayton remained with him much of the time, when not called away to visit other patients. But Davison never spoke to him of Ben nor of Justin.

With Fogg at this time came a man who represented an Eastern home-builders' association, whose object was to establish homes for worthy but comparatively poor men in favorable places on the cheap lands of the West. The association was conducted by charitable men and women who had collected funds for their enterprise. There were many excellent families, this man said, in cities and elsewhere, who would be glad to go upon farms, if only they could do so. It was the purpose of this society to help such people. It would place them upon farms, furnish comfortable houses, give them a start, and permit them to repay the outlay in long-time installments. The self-respect of a farming community thus established would be maintained, and that was a factor making for moral health which could not be overlooked.

When Fogg had shown this man about the valley he introduced him to Justin, and later talked with Justin about him.

" I've listened to him," he said, " and his proposition strikes me favorably. He wants to buy canal and dam, land and everything, and he offers a good price. If we accept, he will cut the tunnel through the ridge to the Warrior River and bring that water in here to irrigate the valley, and he will bring on his colony from the East. As soon as Davison is able to talk about it, I'll put the matter before him.

I think it would mean big money to us, if we sell a part of the land, enough for them to settle their colony on; and sell out to them, too, our interests in the irrigation company. They're in shape to cut that tunnel to the Warrior and put in a good dam. When the thing has been developed as they propose to develop it, every acre in this valley will be worth ten times what it is now. So, you see my point. They'll cut the tunnel, develop and settle the country, and thus make the land we shall still hold worth a good deal more than the whole of it is worth today, counting cattle and everything else in. But to induce them to take up this enterprise we've got to sell them our stock in the canal company and enough land to make it worth their while. If we don't, there are other valleys in the state, and they'll go elsewhere and do what they think of doing here."

Fogg was enthusiastic. This new plan offered greater profit than anything that had yet been brought to his consideration. It built a new dream-world in Justin's mind. In this dream-world the vision of Peter Wingate took actual form, and he saw the desert burst into bloom and fruitage.

At another time when Fogg came down there came with him a cattleman who desired to purchase the herd that grazed on the mesa above Paradise Valley and watered where the fenced chute opened upon the water-holes. It was still a considerable herd, and troublesome near the irrigated farms. Its grazing range lay on the now contracted area that stretched round to the southward of the valley and extended to and beyond the Black Cañon. The

fence by the Black Cañon had been ordered down by the government agents, and the herd was for sale.

Davison's condition was improved, and Fogg went in to discuss with him the subject of the sale of this herd, or a large portion of it, and also the proposition of the man from the East.

Coming out, he met Justin with a smile.

"You haven't seen your father this morning?"

"Not this morning; but I was in his room awhile yesterday, and he seemed much better."

"Very much better; he's going to get well, in my opinion. I've had a long talk with him, and he agrees with me about those sales. The man who came down with me is ready to buy. We'll let him have what he wants; the remainder of the herd we'll throw over on the Purgatoire. You may tell Harkness about it, and things can be made ready for the transfer of the cattle. They'll have to be driven to the station for shipment."

CHAPTER XVIII

PHILOSOPHY GONE MAD

ONE day it became known that Sibyl Dudley had visited Paradise Valley and was stopping in the town. She had ridden out to call on Mary Jasper.

Justin carried the unpleasant news to Clayton.

"I hope I shan't see her," said Clayton, nervously. He had received the news in his study, where he had been writing. Now he laid down his pen. "I hope it isn't her intention to call here. But tell me about it; why has she visited Mary?"

"That I don't know. Lucy saw her as she left Jasper's. She will find out for me."

"And Mary? I haven't heard about her for some time."

"She is very much changed. You would hardly know her. She was in bed nearly a month after Ben's death. But I've thought she looked better lately."

"Youth is strong," said Clayton; "it can survive much. But I am surprised that Mrs. Dudley has called there."

When Justin had nothing further to communicate Clayton turned again to his writing. But that night he called Justin into his study, a place in which Jus-

tin had passed many pleasant hours. Clayton was hollow-cheeked and nervous. The news of the coming of Sibyl to Paradise Valley had not been without its evil effect.

"You are well, Justin?" he inquired solicitously.

"Quite well," said Justin, with some show of surprise.

"I hoped so; but things have gone so wrong here lately that I worry about every one."

He took up some sheets of paper on which he had been writing.

"In our latest talk I was telling you something about the new views I have worked out concerning spiritual matters. I told you I had come to the conclusion that the laws which apply to the material world apply also to the spiritual world. In the material world we have the law of evolution. We do not know how life begins, but we know how it develops. Applying this to the spiritual world, we may say that though we cannot know how spiritual life begins it must develop after it begins. And development implies different grades or orders of beings; name them angels, or what you will."

"You know I said I wasn't able to agree with you about all those things," Justin reminded, gently.

"That doesn't matter; it is nothing to me who believes or disbelieves. Whatever is truth is truth, if it is never accepted by any one. I simply work out these results for my own satisfaction, and I like to talk them over with you."

Justin settled in his chair to listen. This new

view of Clayton's seemed strange, but it was sure to be presented in an interesting manner.

"I think I have made a startling discovery." Clayton's eyes shone and his manner astonished Justin. "In the material world man is the highest product of evolution, though he has not reached the highest possible state. In the spiritual world, which must be more advanced, the highest state has been reached, and he who has reached it we call God. The one best fitted to reach it of all spiritual beings has reached it, and has become absolute. Yet every spiritual being is entitled to reach that state, if he is worthy, each in turn. Being infinite, God could prevent that, and occupy the throne forever. The common belief is that he does so occupy it. But, being just, as well as infinite, he abdicates—suicides, if I may use the word without irreverence—so that another spirit, becoming perfect through ages of development, may take the throne; and when he does so we have what is popularly conceived of as 'the end of the world'—the universe goes back in the twinkling of an eye to fire-mist and chaos, and all things begin over again. That is the great day of fire, when all things are consumed; the day of which the Revelator wrote when he said, 'And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.'"

There was something in Clayton's eyes which Justin had never seen before, and which he did not like; it forced him to combat Clayton's astonishing views.

"But the logic of the situation compels that belief," Clayton insisted.

"Then I refuse to accept the premises."

"But you can't!" His earnestness grew. "See here!" He read over some of the things he had written. "It comes to that, and there is no way of getting round it."

"I get round it by refusing to believe any of it."

"And Justin!" The dark eyes shone with a still brighter light. "I put the question to you:—If God, the Infinite, may commit suicide for a good reason, why may not a man? I put it to you."

Seeing the black thought which lay back of these words Justin began to reason with Clayton, combating the idea with all the vigor and eloquence at his command, and years of training under Clayton had made him a good reasoner. But he could not break the chain of false logic which Clayton had forged, or at least he could not make Clayton see that it was broken, though he talked long and earnestly.

Justin passed an uneasy night, waking at intervals with a nervous start, and listening for something, he hardly knew what. Once, hearing Clayton stirring, he sat up in bed, shivering, ready to leap out and force his way into Clayton's room, if it seemed necessary. He was alarmed, and he thought he had ground for his alarm. The coming of Sibyl to the valley he charged with being responsible for Clayton's strange and changed manner. Sibyl's malevolent influence seemed to lie over everything that came near her, like the blight of the fabled upas.

In the morning Clayton was very quiet, and even

listless. He did not recur to the talk of the previous evening, though Justin momentarily expected him to, and was forging more arguments to combat this new and distressing theory which had wormed its way into Clayton's troubled mind. During the day, when there were so many things to hold his attention, Clayton was not likely to give so much thought to Sibyl and his new conclusions; he had a number of patients, including Davison, who demanded his attention, and as a physician he threw himself into his work without reserve or thought of himself. Therefore, Justin felt easier when Clayton saddled his horse and rode away to visit a sick man, who was one of the newer settlers in the valley.

CHAPTER XIX

SIBYL AND CLAYTON

RETURNING that afternoon from a long and somewhat wearing journey, and being distressed and troubled, Clayton encountered Sibyl, as he turned into the Paradise trail.

She was mounted on a spirited bay horse, which she had obtained in the town, and was riding out to make a call on Mary Jasper. She drew her horse in, when she beheld Clayton, and sat awaiting him. He would have fled, when he saw her there, but that such an act savored of ungallantry and cowardice. So he continued on until he reached her side. She looked into his troubled face with a smile, pushing back her veil with a jeweled white hand from which she had drawn the glove. He had always admired the beauty of her hands.

"I thought it was you," she said in her sweetest manner. "So I waited for you to come up."

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"I have friends in the town, you know, and I came down to visit them; just now I am on my way to call on Mary. But it's such a pleasure to see you, Curtis, that if you don't object I'll ride with you a short distance."

The blood came into his face under that winning smile. He knew he ought to hate this woman, and he had a sense of self-contempt when he could not.

"I thought yesterday of calling on you," she went on.

"I'm glad you didn't," he contrived to say.

"Now, don't be foolish and unreasonable, Curtis. I know what you've thought, and all the horrid things that have been said about me since Ben Davison's death, but they weren't true. It isn't any pleasanter for me to be lied about and misunderstood than it is for you and Justin. Mary's mind has been poisoned against me, but I'll make her see even yet that I'm not the woman she thinks I am."

He sat looking at her in hesitation, the strange light which Justin had noticed again in his eyes; he hardly heard her words, but he could not fail to hear the music of her voice. It had not lost its charm.

"Good God, Sibyl," he burst out, "if you could only have been true to me, and we could have lived happily together!"

There was agony and yearning in his tone.

"You have thought many foolish things, which you had no right to think, just like other people. Shall we ride along? There is a good path leading by those bushes."

"Yes, the trail past the Black Cañon."

The fence hedging the mesa from the valley had been lately removed. He turned his horse toward the path, and they rode along together. At first he did not speak, but listened to her, with a glance at

her now and then as she sat, firmly erect and beautiful, on that handsome bay. Her gray veil fluttered above her face. It was an attractive face, even a beautiful one, after all the years, and the strain and turmoil of them. There were a few fine hair-like wrinkles about the dark eyes, but she knew how to conceal them. The rouge which Lemuel Fogg had noticed in Denver was absent, or, having been deftly applied, was unnoticed by Clayton. Her blue close-fitting riding habit, with a dash of bright color at the throat, became her and heightened her charm. And it was her beauty, unchanged, it seemed to him, which Clayton devoured when he glanced at her; it was her beauty which had won his boyish heart, and it had not lost its power.

"Good God, Sibyl, if you could only have been true to me!" he exclaimed again.

She showed no irritation.

"You have thought many things that weren't true; for you were never willing to believe anything but the worst. This is a lovely country here, isn't it? And that cañon; it's a horrid-looking hole, but fascinating."

"As fascinating as sin, or a beautiful woman."

She laughed lightly.

"You always had a way of saying startling things. If you had set your mind to it you might have been a great and successful flatterer."

"I might have been many things, if other things had been different."

"I suppose that is true of all of us. The trouble

is that there seems to be no forgiveness for mistakes."

"What do you mean by that?"

Her dark eyes looked into his. As they were withdrawn they took in every detail of his face and figure.

"I really didn't know you were so good looking, Curtis! You're really stunning on a horse, in that dark suit and those tan riding boots. I think you must have prospered down here?"

"I have lived."

"What I meant was that you never have been able to forgive any of my mistakes."

"Your sins, you mean."

"Believing evil of me, you say sins. But I have been lied about, Curtis, cruelly lied about; I'm not perfect, any more than you are, but I'm not as bad as you think. You said a while ago, in one of your dramatic ways, that if I could only have been true to you, and we could have lived happily together! If I went wrong once, is that any reason why I couldn't be true to you now?"

His hand shook on the rein.

"I don't believe you could be true to any man or any thing."

"Now is that quite fair?"

"Perhaps it is not quite fair, but you know I have had good cause for saying it."

"Judge me by the present, not by the past. Do as you would be done by. That's been one of the tenets of your creed, I believe."

"Judge you by the present?"

"Yes; give me a chance to show that I can be true to you."

"You mean live with me again as my wife?"

"Why not?"

Again her dark eyes were scanning his face and figure. Plimpton was gone, Ben Davison was dead, and the years were passing. Even Mary had deserted her. She had no money, and soon might not have even so much as a shelter to which she could turn. Mary's desertion and loss of faith in her had been the heaviest blow of all. It uprooted violently a genuine affection.

Sibyl Dudley, in spite of a brave outward show, was beginning to feel the terrifying loneliness of isolation; the protection of even that broken arm of Curtis Clayton, which she had scorned in other days, would be a comfort now. She knew that he had never ceased to love her, and she might win and hold him again. That would at least forefend the terrors of poverty and loneliness which threatened her in the shadows of the gathering years.

Clayton did not reply to her question instantly. He looked off into space with dark eyes that were troubled. Sibyl, glancing at him, saw the stiff left arm swinging heavily, and thought of the flower in that cañon long ago and of the foolish girl who stood on the cañon wall and called to her devoted lover to get it for her. Afterward, that foolish girl had trampled in the dust even the beautiful flower of his perfect love. It began to seem that she would live to regret it, if she were not regretting it already. The mills of the gods are still turned by

the river of Time, and they still grind exceeding fine.

"If I could but trust you!" he said, after a while, with a sigh.

They went on, past the granite wall of the cañon, and out upon the high mesa beyond. Behind them lay Paradise Valley, smiling in the sunshine of the warm afternoon. Before them was a dust of moving cattle. Harkness, having received his instructions from Justin, was bunching the mesa herd, with the assistance of cowboys, preparatory to cutting out the cattle that had been sold and driving them to the station for shipment.

"If I could but trust you!" Clayton repeated, when she made further protest. "Perfect love casteth out fear, but I haven't that perfect love any longer."

He turned on her an anguished face.

"Yet, even while I say that, I know that I have never stopped loving you a single minute in all these years. Such love should have had a better reward."

"I was foolish, Curtis. And I have paid for my foolishness."

The dark eyes turned to his were half veiled by the dark lashes, in the old fascinating way. Cleopatra must have looked thus upon Antony.

"For all the heart-ache I have caused you I beg forgiveness. Kindness has always been your hobby, kindness to everything, even the dumb brutes; and now I think you ought to be a little bit kind to me, when I come to you and tell you that I am sorry

for everything, for all that has been and all that you have believed."

"I forgive you," he said, breathing hard. "I forgave you from the first."

"But I want your love again. It isn't often that a woman comes to a man begging in this way."

"You have always had my love, and you have it now; I never loved any one else. I have never looked on any woman with thought of love since I left you and came to this valley."

The dust cloud had thickened, and from the mesa before them came shouts and confused cries. Then from the right, out of the deep trough-like depression which the cowboys called "the draw," there heaved suddenly a line of moving backs and clicking horns.

Sibyl was putting on the glove she had carried in her jeweled hand and was arranging her veil. She had kept the hand ungloved that its beauty might be displayed, but had begun to feel that both face and hand needed protection from the hot sunshine. Clayton drew rein, when that heaving line rose before him, apparently out of the earth. Until then he had forgotten where he was, had forgotten everything but the woman beside him.

Sibyl's face whitened when she saw those tossing horns; and the veil, escaping in her agitation, was blown toward the cattle. Startled by having come so suddenly on these riders, the cattle were halting in confusion. The fluttering veil, whirled into their midst by the wind, completed the work of fear.

The rustle of a leaf as it scrapes and bobs over

the ground, a flash of sunlight from a bit of broken glass, the scampering of a coyote to his covert, or the tumbling to earth of an unhorsed cowboy, will sometimes throw a moving herd into a panic of fright and bring on a wild stampede, though at other times all these things combined would not have the slightest effect. The reason must be sought in the psychology of fear.

The cattle in front whirled to race away from that fluttering object of terror, while those behind crowded them on. In the midst of the confusion, the larger herd plunged into view out of the dust cloud, hurried along by the cowboys. A quiver of fright ran through the entire heaving mass, and in an instant the stampede madness was born.

"We must get out of this!" Clayton shifted the reins to his stiff left hand and turned her horse about. "You used to be a good horsewoman, and we may have to do some sharp riding."

CHAPTER XX

THE RIDE WITH DEATH

"So steady and firm, leaning low to the mane,
With the heel to the flank and the hand to the rein,
Rode we on;
Reaching low, breathing loud, as a creviced wind blows;
Yet we spoke not a whisper, we breathed not a prayer;
There was work to be done, there was death in the air;
And the chance was as one to a thousand."

SIBYL had buttoned her glove, and she now took the rein herself and settled firmly in the saddle.

"Do you think there is danger? How horrid to have a thing like this happen and spoil our ride!"

To her unpracticed eyes the appearance of the moiling herd was not as threatening as at first. The cattle in front were pushing into those behind and staying their forward progress. Farther back, where the stampede madness was doing its deadliest work, she could not see, for the cattle there were hidden by the dust cloud.

"We must get out of this," said Clayton, in a nervous voice, as he set his horse in motion. "Unless we ride fast they may cut us off at the lower end of the cañon."

The forward line of moving cattle was hurled on again, as the receding wave is caught by the one behind it and flung against the shore. The thunder

of pounding hoofs rose like the lashing of surf on a rocky coast. Then that long line, flashing out of the dust, deepened backward beneath the lifting cloud until it resembled a stretch of tossing sea. The resemblance was more than fanciful. The irregular heaving motion of a choppy sea was there, the white glint of horns was as the shine of wave crests, the tumultuous roar rose and fell like the thunder of billows, and the dust cloud hovered like thick mist.

Clayton and Sibyl were galloping at a swift pace. Terror clutched at her heart now and shone in her dark eyes. She heard the mad roar behind her, and dared not look back. Clayton looked back, and his face became set and white.

"A little faster," he begged, when he had thus glanced behind.

He struck her horse with his hand to urge it on, while his heels flailed the sides of his own beast. Her ribboned whip lifted and fell, and she cried out to her horse in fear. The whole herd was in motion.

It was crescent-shaped; widest in its center, like the hornéd moon; one end rested, or rather moved, on the cañon's rim; the other, out on the flat mesa, was swinging in toward the cañon, farther down. It was this lower point of the crescented herd that Clayton feared most; the great moon-shaped mass was crumpling together, its ends were converging, and if that lower point reached the cañon before the riders could pass through the gap which now beckoned there, they would be caught in the loop

of the crumpled crescent and crushed to death or hurled into the cañon. The only hope lay in passing through that opening while it still remained an opening. And toward that gap they were riding, with a portion of the herd thundering behind along the cañon wall.

"We can make it," Clayton cried hopefully; "we can make it!"

And he urged the horses on.

Though the words encouraged her, Sibyl could not fail to perceive the deadly peril of the closing gap toward which they were speeding.

Fortunately the ground was level, broken only by grassy hillocks and bunches of sage. The few obstructing plum bushes that had survived the fire or had sprouted since that time had been passed already.

As the cattle at the lower end of the crescent were thus brought near, Sibyl beheld the flecking spume of their foaming mouths as it was flung into the air and glistened on their heads and bodies. She could even see the insane glare of their eyes, as they drove toward her in their unheeding course. The thunder of their hoofs was making the ground shake.

"Ride, ride!" Clayton shouted, his voice tremulous. "We can get through. We must get through!"

Even the horses seemed to know what threatened now. Leaping into the narrowing gap, they answered this last appeal of heel, whip, and voice with a further increase of speed. Clayton bent forward in his saddle as if he would hurl himself on, and in

the extremity of his anxiety reached out his stiff hand toward Sibyl's bridle to urge her horse to even a swifter pace.

They were riding dangerously near the cañon wall. Hidden as the cañon was by tall grass, the cattle were driving straight toward it, as though determined to hurl themselves and these wild riders into its depths.

And now the heaving backs, the tapering horns, the glaring eyes, the shining gossamer threads of wispy spume, and the tortured dust cloud, seemed to be flung together into the very faces of the riders. For a moment Sibyl thought all was lost; in imagination she was being impaled on those tapering horns. She heard Clayton yelling encouragement. Then, with spurning feet, the horses passed through the narrow passage; and behind them broke a bellowing tumult, as the foremost cattle began to plunge downward into the cañon.

Sibyl reeled in her saddle, and Clayton put out his stiff hand to support her.

Behind them was that wild roar, where the living cascade was pouring over the cañon wall; and the danger was behind them, and past, he thought.

But suddenly the shooting torrent of bellowing animals was stopped. The portion of the herd which had followed madly after the fleeing riders along the wall, and had been augmented greatly in numbers, struck this lower line. It was like the impact of two cross sections of a landslide. The weaker gave way, over-borne and crushed; and the larger herd streamed on, over a tangle of fallen bodies,

adding to the tangled pile and treading each other down in wild confusion. The danger was not past.

Clayton's stiff hand settled Sibyl's reeling form in the saddle. He was shaking with the strain of his exertions and his emotions. His face was set like a mask and his dark eyes glittered feverishly.

"We must ride on!" he urged. "Just a little farther! I'll help you, but we must ride on!"

Returning fear put strength into her quivering body. She sat erect once more, and again plied the ribboned whip. The horses, with sides smoking and flanks heaving, galloped on. They had made a terrible run, as their dripping bodies and straining red nostrils showed, but they were still game, and they responded to this new call as nobly as to the first.

The section of the herd that had overwhelmed and trampled under foot the cattle in its way, came straight on, now and then tossing an unfortunate into the cañon as a splinter is flung out from a revolving and broken wheel. But the speedier horses drew away again.

While hope was thus returning to Sibyl her horse went down, having thrust a foot into a grass-grown badger hole, and she was torn from the saddle and hurled violently through the air. She struck heavily and lay stunned. Clayton was off his horse and at her side in an instant, but had caution enough left to cling to his bridle rein. Sibyl lay groaning; but when he put his strong sound arm about her, she rose to her feet. Blood showed on her lips.

"It's nothing," she said, as he wiped it away with

his handkerchief. "I—I think I have only cut my lip." The thunder of the approaching hoofs frightened her. "Can you help me into the saddle?"

She clung to him weakly.

"Yes," he answered, supporting her.

But when they turned to her horse he saw that in its fall it had broken its leg. It stood helplessly by the badger hole, from which it had scrambled, holding up that dangling leg.

"You must take my horse!" he said.

"And leave you here?"

"I—I can outrun them, maybe; if I had a revolver I might stop the foremost and get ground to stand on."

She put her hand to her bosom and drew out a small revolver.

"It may be foolish for a woman to carry such a weapon, but it will be useful now."

It was but a little thing, a woman's toy, yet he took it eagerly.

"I can turn them aside with this; you must take my horse at once."

He lifted her in his arms and placed her in his saddle. She did not stop for conventionalities, but set a foot in each stirrup.

"You can make it yet!" he panted. "Go; don't think of me; I will stop them here!"

He knew he could neither stop them nor turn them aside. She did not want to leave him, but fear tore at her heart; the herd was on them again, though the halt had been so brief.

"Go!" he yelled, and struck the horse with the shining revolver.

Its quick leap almost threw her, but she clutched the horn of the saddle and raced on.

Clayton turned to face the mad stampede. That line of tossing heads and clicking horns was not a hundred yards away. He looked at the little revolver and smiled. The strange light which had so startled Justin was again in his eyes.

"I will not leave you to be trodden to death by them, old fellow," he said to the horse; "you deserve a better fate than that."

With the words, he put the pistol to the head of the trembling horse and fired. It was but a small pellet of lead, but it went true, and the horse fell. He stepped up to its body and sent the second shot at the leading steer. He glanced at the sky an instant, then at Sibyl fleeing away along the cañon wall in the direction of the distant ranch buildings. The strange light deepened in his eyes.

"I have saved her," he whispered; "and even God can die, when the reason is great enough!"

Sibyl did not hear those shots in the confusion that clamored behind her, and she had not courage to look back. Having lost her ribboned whip in the fall, she beat the horse with her gloved hand. A numbing pain gripped her heart and made her breathing quick and heavy. At times her sight blurred, and then fear smote hardest, for she felt that she was falling. Yet she rode on, reeling in the deep saddle, and when faint maintained her position by clinging to the saddle horn.

At the door of the ranch house she fell forward on the neck of the horse and slipped in a limp heap to the ground; but she was up again, with hand pressed to her heart, when Pearl Harkness dashed out to assist her.

Behind Pearl came Lucy Davison and Mary Jasper. They had heard the thundering of hoofs, and but a minute before had seen Sibyl ride into view at that mad pace from behind the screening stables. She had outridden the stampeded cattle. The curving cañon wall had turned them at last, and they were beginning to mill.

There was blood on Sibyl's lips and a look of death in her ghastly face; yet she smiled, and tried to stand more erect, when she saw Mary.

"Help me into the house, please," she whispered faintly; "I—I'm afraid I'm hurt."

Supported by Pearl on one side and by Lucy and Mary on the other, Sibyl entered the house. Inside the doorway she reeled and put her hand to her eyes. She stiffened with a shudder, as she recovered.

"I must lie down!" she gasped; but when she took another step the blindness and faintness returned, and she fell, in spite of the supporting arms.

Pearl's cry of alarm and consternation reached the room where Philip Davison lay. It was a lower room and furthest removed from the mesa, but he had heard the rumble of the stampede. The sound of excited voices, Sibyl's heavy fall, and that outcry from Pearl Harkness, called back the wasted strength to his weakened body. He appeared in the

connecting doorway, half dressed, and with a blanket drawn round his shrunken shoulders. He looked a spectre and not a man; his bearded cheeks were hollowed, his straight nose appeared to crook over the sunken mouth like the beak of a bird, and his blue eyes, gleaming from cavernous sockets, stared with unnatural brightness. Seeing Sibyl on the floor with the frightened women about her, he came forward and offered to help. Nothing could have astounded them more than this, for they thought he had not strength to walk.

"Put her in the bed there," he commanded, indicating an adjoining room.

He stooped to assist in lifting her; but the faintness was passing, and she showed that she was still able to assist herself.

"Yes, put me in the bed," she panted.

They helped her to the bed, Davison following with tottering steps, trying to aid. Mary shook the pillow into shape and placed it under her head. Sibyl observed her and put up her gloved hand to touch Mary's hair.

"You are here, dear; I—I am so glad!"

"Where is Clayton?" said Davison, turning about. "He is needed."

A cowboy came running into the house to report the stampede of the cattle.

"Let them go," Davison cried; "you ride at once for Doctor Clayton. Tell him to come immediately."

Pearl Harkness had hurried into the kitchen, thinking of hot-water bags. Mary stared into

Sibyl's face and inanely patted the pillow tucked under her head. Lucy was wiping away the blood that oozed from between Sibyl's lips.

"Come nearer, dear," said Sibyl in a weak voice, speaking to Mary. "Come nearer, dear; I want you to kiss me and forgive me. I—I—"

Her ghastly features became more pinched and ghastly; her hand wavered toward Mary's face. Mary took it and placed it against her warm, tear-wet cheek, in the old way.

Sibyl stared at her.

"I—I can't see you, dear; but you have hold of my hand. The room must be growing dark, or—or is it my eyes? The windows haven't been closed, have they?"

"The windows are open," said Mary; "wide open."

Sibyl still stared at her, while Pearl bustled into the room with cloths and a water bottle.

"It—it is growing dark to me. I'm dying, and I know it. My—my horse fell, and—and Clayton was with me; he is out there yet—where—where the cattle are."

She made another effort to see.

"Hold—hold my hand tight, Mary; and—and please kiss me, won't you? Hold my hand tight! I loved you, Mary—I loved you! Oh, I can't see you—I can't see you at all! Kiss me, and forgive me. I don't want to go into the dark! I always loved the light—the light!"

As Mary stooped with that forgiving kiss, Sibyl touched her hair with affection.

"I forgive you everything," said Mary.

"You won't believe that I truly loved you, Mary, but I did; always remember that I did. Oh, I want the light—the light—I can't see you! I'm afraid there isn't any light—beyond! I could bear the fires of hell if they but gave light and I could live on. But I'm afraid—afraid, Mary, that—that there isn't anything beyond; and that I shall never see you again!"

She put up her hands, gasping for breath.

"I've been a wicked woman, but I loved you, Mary; oh, I loved you; and I tried to shield you all I could! I oughtn't to have taken you to Denver, but I wanted you, and I was selfish. Oh, this darkness! Open the windows; I'm—I'm afraid of the darkness! Open the—windows; I must—must have light!"

But the light did not return.

Clayton's body, mangled beyond recognition, was found near that of the horse he had mercifully slain.

CHAPTER XXI

RECONCILIATION

PHILIP DAVISON had an accession of strength after that and sat at his desk through the whole of one afternoon, thinking and writing. When Justin made his customary call in the morning and was about to turn away, Davison bade him stay.

"You will find some papers in the upper right hand drawer of my desk, Justin. Get them and bring them to me."

Justin found the papers and handed them to him.

"Now, sit down by the bed again."

Justin took the chair, and looked at his father, who reclined in the bed propped with pillows. Davison had changed greatly. His hair and beard were almost white and his blue eyes gleamed from deep sockets. There was something pathetic in the contrast between the emaciated, trembling father and the robust, stalwart son. Justin pitied him.

"There are some things I want to talk to you about, Justin." His hands trembled so much that the papers rattled as he unfolded them. "I am not able to attend to business now, and may never be able. Fogg will be here to-morrow, and there are some things I want to talk over with you before he

comes. He is anxious to sell out to that man from the East. He thinks the chance is one not to be lost."

It was the first time that Davison had offered to consult with Justin on any subject, or had spoken to him in this manner. Justin drew his chair closer to the bed.

"If I can help you in any way."

"I've got to have your help, I suppose," said Davison, with a touch of his old petulance. "When a man is wrecked he clutches at—well, we won't talk about that! We'll have to agree to let bygones be bygones. I don't want to hurt your feelings, and I want to do right by you."

He put down the papers, which he had been about to read.

"By the way, Justin, I've been thinking a good deal about you and Lucy. You and she are still in the notion of marrying, I suppose?"

His voice was kindly now, and it softened still more as he beheld the hurt expression on his son's flushed face.

"Forget what I said just now, and I'll try to be more considerate. This has been a terrible thing for me; how terrible I don't think you can ever realize. I had made Ben my idol. It was foolish, of course, but in this world men do foolish things; I have done my full share of them. So if there is anything to be forgiven by any one I am the one to do the forgiving."

His hands shook again on the papers and tears came into the sunken eyes.

"I have forgiven Ben everything. I think he was not so much to blame after all. I was wild, too, in my youth; and, forgetting that, I did not bring him up right. If he had lived; that is, if——" The tears overflowed on his cheeks, and he stopped. "But we won't talk about that. I wish I could forget it."

He folded the papers and spread them out again, while he sought to gain control of his voice.

"If you and Lucy are still in the notion of getting married, you have my full consent to do so. You are my son, and I shall treat you as a son should be treated; and she is my adopted daughter. So, whatever I have is yours and hers, when I am gone."

"You will get well!" said Justin, earnestly and with feeling.

"Yes, I believe so!" There was a touch of the old fire now. "I think I shall get well. I have improved lately. My head doesn't trouble me so much, for one thing. It has cleared so that I was able to do a good deal of writing yesterday. I shall get well, but I know I shall never be the same; I shall never be able to take the interest in business matters that I did. I don't seem to care what goes on in the valley and on the ranch now. Even the loss of those cattle didn't touch me. Once I should have felt it, just as Fogg did."

"Lucy will be very glad to know that we have your full consent to our marriage," Justin ventured.

"Of course she will; and you, too. It will even please me to have you married as soon as possible.

You may live in any of the houses we have bought that will suit you, or a new one can be built."

He took up the papers again.

"I shall turn the management of the place over to you until I am able to manage it myself. You can consult with Fogg, and I will give you what instructions I can. I hope to be strong enough in another month to ride about, and then I can assist you even more. Fogg thinks it would be well to sell our canal interests and a part of our land to this Eastern man. I agree with him. I think we ought to hold a good deal of the valley land; it's going to be valuable, when that tunnel is cut. That man will bring in a colony of farmers and gardeners; a good many people can live here, with the aid of the irrigation that can be had from the Warrior River. I want to stay here, in spite of what has happened; and you and Lucy will want to stay here. There isn't a prettier valley in the state, and it's our home; and the sale of a part of our land, with the cultivation of the rest of it, and the increase in values, will make us independent."

He began to read from the papers. To Justin's surprise they held a list of names of men Davison had wronged and to whom he wished now to make restitution.

"I was over-persuaded in a good many things, and often went with Fogg against my better judgment. But I haven't anything to say against him. Whatever I did I am willing to shoulder. He is a first-class business man; I admire his ability to make money, and I wanted money, for Ben. These things

I have marked here I desire made right, so far as they can be made right. I don't want you to give away money to anybody. Money isn't to be shaken out of every tree, except by a man like Fogg. Pay whatever is just, but no more. The names are here, and the amounts. I have been generous in the estimates, and you will have no call to go farther than I have."

He put the papers in Justin's hands.

"There; I turn this business, and all the rest of my business, over to you! And you and Lucy may get married as soon as you like. Consult with Fogg concerning the land to be sold."

The blue eyes smiled from the deep sockets, and the face was softer and more kindly. Already Davison had a higher and more satisfactory opinion of himself.

"You are my son, Justin. I have no other son now; and we will try to be to each other what we ought to have been all these years."

"Father!"

Justin's voice trembled; and though when he stood erect he towered above other men, he humbled himself now as a child, and laid his first kiss of love on his father's wasted cheek.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DREAMS THAT CAME TRUE

THE colony from the East had been established, and the harnessed water was doing the will of man. At the head of the valley, where the cultivated fields began to widen into a green expanse of gardens and small farms, Steve Harkness stopped his buggy in the trail and awaited the coming of another buggy he had seen issue from the town. With Harkness sat Pearl and Helen, the latter a slender, awkward girl now, but in the eyes of her father beautiful beyond the power of words to express. The three were dressed in their best—they had been attending church. Harkness shook out his handkerchief to wipe his perspiring face—church services always made him perspire freely—and the scent of cinnamon drops thickened the air.

"It's Justin and Lucy coming," said Pearl.

"Yes, I knowed it was; that's why I pulled in. I don't reckon a handsomer couple rides this valley trail, present company always ac-cepted. Davison was with 'em at church, but I s'pose he stopped in town to take dinner with some one."

Harkness tucked his handkerchief into his pocket and looked down the valley, where the fruitful fields were smiling. In the midst of the fields and the

gardens were many houses and clumps of shade trees. The flat-topped mountain behind the town lay against the bosom of the summer sky like a great cameo. A Sabbath peace was on the land, and a great peace was in the heart of Steve Harkness.

"It's nice to have a home," he declared thoughtfully, as he looked at the quiet valley, "and it's nice to see other people have homes. But until a man is married and has one of his own he don't know how 'tis."

Pearl glanced down at her dress of China silk and settled its folds comfortably and proudly about her.

"I think farming is better than the cattle business, anyway."

"Yes, farmin' this way, with irrigation; irrigation with plenty of water beats rainfall in any country under the sun. I'm satisfied. But you don't never hear me saying anything ag'inst the cattle business; it's all right, and it will continue in this country fer a good many years yit. But Paradise Valley was cut out fer farmers and their homes. I'm always reckonin' that the Lord understood his business when he made men and land and cattle. The valleys that can be irrigated fer the farmers, and the high dry land that can't be fer the men that want to raise cattle. And things will always come out right, if you'll only give 'em time. It's been proved right here."

When, after pleasant greetings, Harkness had

driven on, Justin, who did not care to proceed straight home on that beautiful day, turned into the trail that led to the higher land on the edge of the mesa, where the view of the valley was better. Coming out upon the highest point, they saw the valley spread wide before them, green as an emerald. The few groves were many times multiplied. On every hand were homes, girt by gardens and embowered in flowers. Irrigating canals and laterals glittered like threads of silver. Warrior River, uniting with Paradise Creek, had furnished means for the transformation of the desert, and it was literally blossoming as the rose.

Thus surveying the valley, Justin saw the fulfillment of the dream of the dreamer, Peter Wingate. More, he had the satisfaction of knowing that in the position he held, that of superintendent and manager of the irrigating company, he had done his full share in bringing that dream to its beautiful realization. He had helped to make the one-time desert bloom. Years had run their course, yet the dream had come true. He had prospered also, not only financially, but in other ways; he was in the state senate now, the position Fogg had held. And, though he was a farmer and irrigator, he was, also, a ranchman.

As he sat thus viewing the smiling valley, with his wife beside him, seeing there the fulfillment of the dream of the preacher, Justin turned to her whom he loved best of all in the world. Looking into her eyes, where wifely love had established

itself, he beheld there the fulfillment of another dream; and beholding it, he bent his head and kissed her.

"Lucy," he said, with tender earnestness, "this, too, is Paradise."